

Worship transcript for April 25, 2021

Prelude (All Souls BAM Ensemble: Rochelle Rice, Jen Hayman, Dante' Pope, vocals; Janelle Gill, piano; Romeir Mendez, bass; Dante' Pope, drums)

"I Remember, I Believe" (Bernice Johnson Reagon)

I don't know how my mother walked her trouble down
I don't know how my father stood his ground
I don't know how my people survive slavery
I do remember, that's why I believe

I don't know why the rivers overflow their banks
I don't know why the snow falls and covers the ground
I don't know why the hurricane sweeps through the land
Every now and then
Standing in a rainstorm, I believe

I don't know why the angels woke me up this morning soon
I don't know why the blood still runs thru my veins
I don't know how I rate to run another day
I am here still running', I believe...

My God calls to me in the morning dew
The power of the universe, It knows my name
Gave me a song to sing and sent me on my way
I raise my voice for justice, I believe...

Call to Worship (Rev. Kathleen Rolenz)

From many places of the Spirit and around the planet we gather this day
Some are bright and eager, awake and alert for this fresh morning,
Some are heading into night and winding down
Some are hopeful and inspired
Some are struggling and fearful
Some are ready to act boldly for justice
Some are hesitant and uncertain
Wherever you are in time or place or heart or space
You are welcome here.
Come, let us worship together.
We now invite Jenny Kane and son Joaquin Fernandez de Cordoba to kindle our chalice flame.

Chalice Lighting (Jenny Kane and Lucia and Joaquin Fernandez de Cordoba)

Hymn

“Return Again”

Return again
Return the home of your soul
Return to who you are
Return to what you are
Return to where you are
Born and reborn again

Welcome (Kerry Reichs)

Good Morning! My name is Kerry Reichs, my pronouns are she/her/hers, and I’m your Worship Associate today. Welcome to All Souls Church, where our name says it all! For 200 years, our congregation has sought to live up to the vision inherent in our name, All Souls. Our mission is to build what Dr. King called the “Beloved Community” – a vision of human community where the divisions that separate us in our daily lives come tumbling down and we recognize that all people —people of diverse race, creed, sexual orientation, gender expression and ability—are welcome at the table of God’s love and human fellowship. As Unitarian Universalists, we are diverse in many ways but united in our belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and in the obligation to express our faith through acts of justice and compassion. We invite you to join us as we seek to create a diverse, justice-seeking, spirit growing community that is true to the dream of all souls.

We pause for a moment each week to recognize the land on which our church stands and the Indigenous communities that were here before us, and remain with us now and in the future. The closest tribe was Nacotchtank, from which the name Anacostia is derived, part of the Piscataway group of tribes. Individually and collectively throughout our planet we reside on land with a history of its own. Let’s share a moment of silence to reflect. [Silence]

I’d like to extend a special welcome this morning to those of you who are new to All Souls, or those who are joining or rejoining us from afar—the silver lining of Zoom church that we are a global community now. We are glad you’re here. Please send a Direct Message to our Membership Coordinator Gary Penn if you’d like to be included on our mailing list.

I went to church last Sunday for the first time in a year, for the children’s clothing swap. Stepping into Pierce Hall and seeing again how the light falls and hearing the creak of the floorboards under my feet brought the emotions. This peculiar pandemic year has shown however, that All Souls is so much more than a building. We live without walls. If we were together in our uplifting sanctuary, I’d now invite you to turn to someone near you in the pew for a handshake or a hug. Instead, I invite you to “behold” – rather than absorbing the light streaming through our sanctuary windows, bask in the light emanating from the faces of your All Souls friends in DC and around the world. You maybe didn’t shower today, this week, are in your pajamas, or are only “top half ready” in Zoom-speak, but I encourage you to set your screen to the right angle, turn on your video, and scroll through the fun in gallery view. Although you’ll remain on mute, please exchange smiles and waves and chats as you draw strength and joy from the exquisite gallery of this congregation. Again, welcome to All Souls Church!

Announcements and Prayer (Rev. Rolenz)

I'm Rev. Kathleen Rolenz, serving as All Souls Interim Senior Minister, and I'd like to add my welcome to Kerry's. I'm especially pleased to welcome my colleague and our guest minister for this Sunday, the Rev. Mykal O'Neal Slack. Rev. Slack is the Community Minister for Worship and Spiritual Care for Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism, an organization and growing spiritual community committed to supporting Black folx in our faith, and he is also a co-founder of the Transforming Hearts Collective, a ministry that both supports spaces for LGBTQ people to access resilience, healing, and spirituality and resources faith communities and other groups for the work of radical inclusion and culture shift. He is a Black, queer & trans husband and father from the South, committed to healing and truth-telling, as well as community accountability and care. Rev. Mykal – it is a great joy and blessing that you are with us today and we are looking forward to your message.

All Souls continues to provide not only worship services, but programs and events that may be of interest to you. Here are a few things that are coming up this week and in the weeks ahead. There are two groups meeting after today's service; Multi-racial families affinity group 11:45 – 1 PM and Trans Souls with Rev. Mykal, 11:45 – 1 PM <https://zoom.us/j/2621087856>. Information about how to join those calls can be found on the chat on the calendar page of the church's website.

This evening, from 4 – 5 pm the Racial Justice Action Team will meet; and tomorrow night, steep yourself in a philosophical and spirited discussion with the Philosophical Souls, from 7 – 8:30 PM

Mark your calendars for another Virtual General Assembly, which is the largest gathering of Unitarian Universalists, from all over the country from places around the globe. If you have registered for General Assembly already, please contact Justis Tui justis_tuia@hotmail.com Justis will submit the names of those who are willing to serve as delegates on behalf of ASC AND, he'll be gathering all of us who are attending General Assembly prior to the event. This is probably the last year that General Assembly will be fully virtual, so do consider attending! Justis' email is in the chat.

We now turn our hearts and minds to those celebrations and sorrows which touch our immediate and extended community.

Congratulations to former All Souls minister, Rev. Abbey Tennis, and her spouse Kai Lovell, on the birth of Nova Michael Tennis-Lovell. He arrived on Thursday, April 8, so just over two weeks in the world. Love to the entire family as they adjust to the new rhythms.

More congratulations to All Souls members Sheri Bolduc (bowl-duck) and Trinese Washington, who were married on Friday at the Potomac River in Cabin John MD. Wishing them many blessings as they keep their partnership going strong.

And two concerns:

We are thinking of Carol Chamberlain, an elder of the church in her 90's, who fell Thursday. Carol had hip surgery, and is now recuperating at Georgetown Hospital. She will be released to rehab facility later in the week. Please send her healing wishes, and cards go to her home right now.

We mourn the death of Carolyn Long, beloved niece to long-time member Caroline Boston, and close cousin to Taquiena and Michon Boston. Carolyn died of COVID on April 12 and was a well-known Ward 2 city government staff and volunteer. Our hearts are with the family in this difficult loss.

Pause now with me, in meditation, reflection, prayer – as is your practice:

Oh Spirit of Life –

What a week it's been. Many of us felt a great sense of relief when the Minneapolis jury found Derek Chauvin guilty on all counts. We can and must celebrate these small victories; while at the same time acknowledging that there is so much work to do – so much cultural and systemic change that must happen.

And yet, just this past week six people were fatally shot by police in 24 hours after the verdict was released. We don't know all their stories or the circumstances behind these shootings, but we do know this – the culture of violence is killing us and we can and must find a better way.

Today, we also pray for all transgender youth and their families, who are harmed by newly passed laws or restrictions allowing physicians to deny transition care for minors, schools to deny access to sports and programs, and doctors to refuse to treat trans persons, even in the emergency room. This is an attack on trans children and their families with potentially devastating consequences. May we all be part of the fight against these evil legislation.

With so much wrong, may we also find today that which is healthy and life-affirming in ourselves and in one another. May we celebrate the very breath we take, the friendships which sustain us, the church which is there for us week after week; the communities which nurture us; the very planet which gives us life. May we find amidst the ever unfolding beauty of this season times of joy and appreciation for this one, wild precious life we have and we share. For all this and so much more – we give our thanks and praise. Amen and May it Be So.

Hymn 123

“Spirit of Life”

Fuente de amor, ven hacia mi
Y al corazon cantale tu compasion
Sopla al volar, sube en la mar
Hasta moldear la justicia de la vida
Arraigame, liberame
Fuente de amor, ven a mi, ven a mi

Spirit of life, come unto me
Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion
Blow in the wind, rise in the sea
Move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice
Roots hold me close, wings set me free
Spirit of life, come to me, come to me.

Reading (Rev. Mykal Slack)

Excerpt from “Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements”
(Charlene Carruthers)

There are always forces, sometimes even within a social justice movement, that fight to kill the imagination of those actively engaged in the struggle (and for that matter, to limit all thinking about radical possibilities). But oppressed people have always imagined that freedom is possible, and our imagination will not be vanquished. The Black radical tradition [invites all of us into] an ongoing and persistent cultivation of the radical imagination. It is within the spaces of imagination, the dream spaces, that liberatory practices are born and grow, leading to the space to act and to transform.

Sermon (Rev. Slack)

“Unleashing a Radical Imagination”

Good morning, All Souls! I don’t know about you, but my soul has been weary. Weary from a pandemic that changed how we live life over the past year and change; weary from generations of state-sanctioned violence perpetuated against Black and Brown bodies that had us, just in the last week, calling the names of Duante Wright, Ma’Khia Bryant, and Andrew Brown, Jr.; and weary from work – so much work – to undo systems of oppression and the harm they do across lines of race, class, ability, gender, sexuality and other lived experiences. When my soul is weary, song grounds me. It holds me. It clears a pathway for healing unlike almost anything or anyone else. And so, I begin with song this morning. I’ll sing it once through and then invite you to join me the second time through. The words will be available on your screens.

May I be Light in You
May You be Light in Me
Into our hearts, Into our souls
Let Love abide

May I be Love in You
May You be Love in Me
From this place, out to the world
For all time

I come before you calling the names of Lewis Howard Latimer, Florida Ruffin Ridley, Marjorie Bowens Wheatley, Egbert Ethelred Brown, Fannie Barrier Williams, David H. Eaton, Frances

Ellen Watkins Harper, Lewis A. McGee, and both of the Revs Jordon – Joseph F. and Joseph H. I come calling the names of Chester McCall, Hope Johnson, and Elandria Williams, all Black ancestors who gave so much to Unitarianism, Universalism and Unitarian Universalism, and whose names we don't hear often enough. May they hold me and be with all of us in our time together today.

One of the first things that happened when I crossed the threshold of a Unitarian Universalist church for the first time was the minister there gave me a copy *A Chosen Faith*. Some of you are likely familiar with it. This little book carried a lot of big ideas in it. And while they weren't brand new to me, John Buehrens and Forrest Church offered a faith that was freshly packaged and invigorating at a time when I was feeling lost. Wanting something robust and worth living into, I would read passages from it over and over again, trying to find myself in it. Unitarian Universalism was fairly new to me. But I was grateful for the opening and the opportunity to be made new.

One of the opening quotes to chapter 5 of that book struck me, and I found myself referring back to it this week. Greta W. Crosby, retired UU minister, said:

When you and I look at these trees, these flowers, anything at all, we are the universe looking at its handiwork. ... We, too, all of us together, all the eyes of all the creatures, are the eye of God. That is why we need each other, our many ways of seeing, that together we may rejoice, and see clearly, and find the many keys to abundant life.

“We are the universe looking at its handiwork.” Put in a way more attentive to all of who we are and what's been happening all around us... WE are the universe, in its fullness, experiencing its handiwork...in its fullness and AT. ITS. WORST. In my early discernment about today's sermon, I hesitated to say so, in part because my own fatigue held me back. But my Spirit wouldn't let me not tell the truth today.

Our handiwork is and has long been state-sanctioned violence, perpetuated primarily against Black and Brown bodies, people struggling with mental illness, queer and trans people, and women. Our handiwork is a capitalism that necessitates that some of us have way too much and that far too many of us have far too little. Our handiwork promotes systems of oppression and scarcity that keep all the people from having, at bare minimum, what the people need to thrive – and we're talking about the stuff of schools, workplaces, hospitals, and churches. The handiwork of humanity is chaos and fear, power-mongering and deadly. Ask Paula Bryant Ellis, Ma'Khia's mother, and Katie Wright, Duante's mother. Ask all the parents, siblings, cousins, co-workers, classmates, and friends of all the people we know who've been killed. They can tell us all about it.

Coming off the heels of the 51st anniversary of the modern environmental movement on April 22nd and the call to Restore Our Earth, we are faced with the painful reality that our handiwork relative to people being people together is in desperate need of reworking.

And since I'm apparently in the business of telling the whole truth this morning, let me also say this: Just because we are Unitarian Universalists, we cannot lie to ourselves and pretend like that

handiwork of which I speak does not also live right here – within our walls, on the edges of our covenants, and built into systems that have served as foundations for our being and becoming since long before the 1961 merger and well into today. The pastoral care call I took just a week ago from a Black woman whose Unitarian Universalism and sense of community was shaken by a fellow congregant who publicly questioned Black people’s intellectual capacity for Unitarian Universalism is just one of a thousand examples I could give. The conversation I had with a choir section leader at a congregation I served about not feeling comfortable talking about how poor she had been because of all very monied conversations her fellow choir members had is another. There may be people in this room who have their own stories that may never get told. It is a violence of a wholly different sort than what we’ll likely find in our newsreels, but it’s violence nonetheless. [Can we take a breath together right now?]

What is our responsibility in this world we’re living in and this country we’re halfway making it in? What is ours to contribute to a Unitarian Universalism that far too often does not hold us in the ways we may need holding and embolden us in ways that are necessary for us to be, both out in the world and in here, who we say we want to be? It’s not about being nice or good; we can all be nice and we are all good enough. It’s about doing the sometimes unfathomable thing of co-creating spaces where internal and external exchanges between people can make each person’s Light shine a little brighter, even taking into account what makes us incredibly different from one another. Rev. Bill Sinkford, former UUA president, minister of First Unitarian Portland, and a member of BLUU’s Advisory Team, offered these good words in the edited volume, *Not For Ourselves Alone: Theological Essays on Relationship*:

The more important lesson and challenge, as we navigate the tender territory where our calling meets the reality of our lives, is to resist seeing only what we want (or need) to see.

This is where a radical imagination becomes not only generative and beautiful, but a moral imperative in this world we are not just watching unfold before us, but that we are living and breathing in and through. The concept of the “radical” inherits its most powerful meaning from the Latin word for “rooted,” (*radicatus*) in the sense that radical ideas, ideologies, or perspectives are informed by the understanding that social, political, economic, and cultural problems are outcomes of deeply rooted and systemic antagonisms, contradictions, power imbalances, and forms of oppression and exploitation.

In their book, *The Radical Imagination: Social Movement Research in the Age of Austerity*, Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish offer that

The idea of the imagination is as evocative as it is elusive. Not only does the imagination allow us to project ourselves beyond our own immediate space and time, it also allows us to envision the future, as individuals and as collectives.

And so, at its most superficial, then, the radical imagination, is the ability to imagine the world, our lives, our communities and congregations, and social institutions not as they are but as they might otherwise be. But a radical imagination is not just about dreaming of different futures, right? It’s not just figuring out how to talk about possibilities, or creating tables and blueprints to make them make sense, while all of that may be important. It’s about bringing those possibilities

back from the future to inspire action in the here and now. And while we have much to learn all along the way, it is also true that some of what is possible is already inside of us, waiting for the right moment to reveal itself, if we would only believe in the fire welled up inside us to do that strange and altogether marvelous new thing.

Charlene Carruthers, who we heard from a few moments ago, is attempting in her book, *Unapologetic*, to enliven the power of the radical imagination by invoking the Black radical tradition and all the things that make up that tradition (hip-hop, faith-rooted community care and organizing, black socialism, you name it). She offers a key element when she writes that “freedom-dreaming is one of the most significant things any human can do.” Freedom-dreaming. Some of us...perhaps many of us, are familiar with this concept.

Originally conceived by UCLA History Professor Robin D. G. Kelley, and uplifted by Carruthers and others, “freedom-dreaming” is really a practice of detangling ourselves from the fictional narrative of limited possibility. It’s about putting aside the models of scarcity, time limitedness, and control to make way for the more expansive views of abundance, spaciousness, collaboration, and relationship. And so, freedom-dreaming is actively creating a world that works for more people, for more life, where more of us are collaborating on the process of dreaming and visioning and implementing that world.

Visionary fiction writer Walidah Imarisha put it this way: “[We live in a quantum universe—the possibilities are endless](#). The way systems of power maintain themselves is to DENY us that and to tell us there’s only one or two options that are both terrible.” The freedom dreaming of a radical imagination tells us that there are, in fact, so many good and meaningful ones. And the way we find possibilities is to gather together, as people with differing ideas and dreams, joys and pains, and discover them TOGETHER! Stay up late, if we have to. Fight about it, if we have to. (We UUUs struggle so hard with conflict, as if it’s possible for every single thing we bring to be in alignment with every single other thing that everybody else is bringing!) But down our egos for five minutes, if we have to. Stop talking and listen, if we have to. Take up more space because we’ve been silenced and silent for too long, if we have to.

These notions that there ARE an abundance of beautiful possibilities, that we CAN take our time, that relationship-building IS more life-giving than rule-making, should make sense to us as Unitarian Universalists! It should and it can make more sense, if we keep working at it. Everything we do and say, and how we show up in community as beloved community can make the difference in what happens next.

But in order to discover or rediscover what lies at the core of the robust, live-saving faith that Unitarian Universalism truly is, it matters that we do our part to live more fully into some of the rich and magical ministry that is before us, but that may otherwise seem impossible just because we’ve never done it before, or don’t understand it. From how we welcome newcomers to how we think about and understand power. From who we support in the wider community to what systems of oppression and white supremacy we do the work to help dismantle, both within and outside our walls. All of this matters in a world that is crumbling and where people are dying all around us.

And why? Because a radical imagination, the freedom-dreaming that can help us live into the very best of what community care, support, and accountability is and means for ALL the people is where the most LOVE lives! And where the most LOVE lives is where a restoration of our humanity begins and where our Unitarian Universalism has the ability to thrive.

May it be so.

Ashe, Amen & Blessed be.

Anthem (BAM Ensemble)

“Liquid Spirit” (Gregory Porter)

Un re-route the rivers
Let the dammed water be
There’s some people down the way that’s thirsty
So let the liquid spirit free

The people are thirsty
‘Cause of man’s unnatural hand
Watch what happens when the people catch wind
and the water hits the banks of that hard dry land

Clap your hands now
Go ‘head and clap your hands now
Clap your hands now

Watch for that wave
It might come like a final flood
The people haven’t drank in so long
The water won’t even make mud

After it comes, it might come with a steady flow
Grab the roots of the tree
Down by the river, fill your cup when your spirit’s low

Clap your hands now
Go ‘head and clap your hands now
Clap your hands now

Dip down and take a drink
And fill your water tank
Dip down and take a drink
And fill your water tank

Offertory (Traci Hughes-Trotter)

Good morning, All Souls!

It's so nice to be with you this morning.

The time is now for radical imagination. We are in the enviable position to be able to choose to imagine what will be, and what we can create together.

There is hope, and yes, much work left to do. And you, ALL SOULS, are radical enough and bold enough to be light, to be love for one another.

Today is the official end of the All Souls All In! annual pledge campaign. On behalf of the executive team and the entire staff, I extend my gratitude to those of you who have made your pledge for the upcoming fiscal year. To date, just over \$780,000 dollars have been pledged to support the church. Our goal is to raise \$1.2M.

Your pledge dollars are the basis of the budget for the entire church year. Your support will allow the church to continue to:

Provide hybrid worship services when the doors of the church reopen in the Fall.

Stellar and amazingly beautiful music like you heard this morning.

Fun and engaging Religious Education programming for children and youth.

Offer compelling Adult Spiritual Education classes.

And to support the much needed social justices initiatives because those initiatives give the people who need it the most the space to “freedom dream.”

It's not too late. Please make your pledge today. Our goal is 100% participation. If you can please increase your pledge by 10% and give a little extra to make up the difference for those in the All Souls community who cannot give as normal due to the economic impact of COVID 19.

Remember, your pledge is your intention to give and to fulfill your promised gift to the church between July 1, 2021 and June 30th of next year.

Your pledge and your gifts to All Souls allows us — church leadership and staff — to create those spaces of love, relationship, fellowship, and yes radical imagination that pushes each of us make the impossible possible.

Thank you.

Hymn

“Come and Go With Me”

Come and go with me to that land
Come and go with me to that land
Come and go with me to that land where I'm bound

There'll be freedom in that land
There'll be freedom in that land
There'll be freedom in that land where I'm bound

There'll be justice in that land
There'll be justice in that land
There'll be justice in that land where I'm bound

There'll be singing in that land
There'll be singing in that land
There'll be singing in that land where I'm bound

Come and go with me to that land
Come and go with me to that land
Come and go with me to that land where I'm bound

Benediction (Rev. Slack)

Music (BAM Ensemble)

“Song for Mia” (Toshi Reagon and Lizz Wright)

I went down to the water, all night long
I put my feet in, all night long
And I went down to the water, all night long
And I put my dreams in, all night long
And what you said to me, I can't say
I'll take these bad dreams and I'll throw them all away
I'm at the shore now, the waters at my back
I can feel the waves coming they're, heavy and black
But I can't turn away now
They're singing' a song
And I, I'm in harmony
And I'm singing along
And what you did to me, I can't take no more
I'll take these bad dreams and I'll lay them at the shore
The edge of the ocean I'll never see
I look out in the distance, it's staring back at me
And I went down to the water all night long
And I put my dreams in, all night long
I put my fear in, all night long
I put my dreams in, all night long