

Worship transcript for May 9, 2021

Prelude (All Souls Jubilee Singers)

“What We’re Asking” (Mona Warner)

What we’re asking for is Peace
What we’re asking for is Love
And we’re asking for forgiveness
for all the things we have done.
What we’re asking for is Hope
What we’re asking for is Grace
And we’re asking that each one of us
Will make the world a better place.

Lo que pedimos es la paz Can you forgive
Lo que pedimos es amor Can you live
Y que nos disculpen Can we give
por todo que he mos hecho to one another
Y queremos la esperanza When we forgive
Y queremos la amistad We learn to live
Con poder de cada uno And make the world
El mundo mejor sera a better place

What we’re asking for is Peace Can you forgive
What we’re asking for is Love Can you live
And we’re asking for forgiveness Can we give
for all the things we have done. To one another
What we’re asking for is Hope When we forgive
What we’re asking for is Grace We learn to live
And we’re asking that each one of us And make the world
Will make the world a better place. A better place

Call to Worship (Rev. Rob Keithan)

We gather today, and every Sunday, to ground our being in a greater truth, a greater love, and a greater courage than we can find alone. May we be faithful stewards of this calling. Come, let us worship together.

And here to do our chalice lighting is Fiona Brideoake & Oscar and Willa Brideoake Berry.

Chalice Lighting (Fiona and Willa Brideoake Berry)

Intro to Hymn (Lenard Starks)

Washington, DC pianist, composer and band leader, Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington, composed a monumental, ground breaking, jazz symphony that he named “Black, Brown and

Beige” (BB&B). It was debuted at Carnegie Hall in 1943, but did not start to gain wide acceptance until about 15 years later. BB&B, is a musical mural of African-American life that parallels some of the history of race relations in America from the Civil War to WWII. “Come Sunday” is a panel in that mural that portrays Sunday as a day of respite from the usual harassment and toil encountered during long, tedious workdays. That sentiment is shared not only by African-Americans, but perhaps by most Americans, um, except for those who must plan and carry out Sunday worship services. Please stay muted and join us in singing “Come Sunday.”

Hymn 202

“Come Sunday”

Lord, dear Lord above, God almighty, God of love,
Please look down and see my people through.
I believe that God put sun and moon up in the sky.
I don't mind the grey skies, 'cause they're just clouds passing by.
Lord, dear Lord above, God almighty, God of love,
Please look down and see my people through.
Heaven is a goodness time, a brighter light on high.
Give regard to others and you'll prosper by and by.
Lord, dear Lord above, God almighty, God of love,
Please look down and see my people through.
I believe God is now, was then, and always will be.
With God's blessing we can make it through eternity.
Lord, dear Lord above, God almighty, God of love,
Please look down and see my people through.

Welcome (Laura Dely)

Welcome to our All Souls streamed service. I am Laura Dely, pronouns are she, her, hers and I am one of the Seminarian participants who Rev. Kathleen has invited to serve as a worship associate this morning. Today is Mother's Day! Or as some activists say: It's Mamas Day! Mother's Day was begun as a peace movement by the abolitionist Unitarian Julia Ward Howe in 1872. She called it a “Mother's Day for Peace” at the end of the brutal Civil War, almost a decade after she wrote the lyrics to “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” In an international effort, Howe called on mothers of all nations to lead their countries to reject war, and to seek peace “in the name of womanhood and of humanity.”

Today, Mamas Day is a rallying cry for justice for all the women who mother, “biologically and chosen, adoptive and foster, queer and trans., near and far, for everything they do for us and our communities.” And may we support women today who bear the responsibility of parenting in the family with policy that helps the poor, and the middle class.

In an effort to acknowledge and support Indigenous communities, it is important to recognize the land on which our church and where all of us stand. Did you know you can look up the tribe that lived on the land where you live? Check the chat for a link. Let us take a moment of respectful silence to acknowledge those whose lands we inhabit. (moment of silence)

If we were together in the building, we would turn and greet one another . While we are still on-line, we do something called “beholding.” Take a moment to scroll through the gallery view, say hello in the chat to one another, and behold one another’s faces as we together, create community.

Announcements and Prayer (Rev. Rolenz)

I’d like to add my welcome to our worship associates this morning. I’m Rev. Kathleen Rolenz, pronouns are she-her-hers and I’m serving as your interim senior minister. Happy Mother’s Day to all of you who are mothers, have mothers, had mothers or who have been mothered by someone you loved you into being.

This morning’s service is about safety and I want to acknowledge that safety is not an abstract or intellectual concept. It’s a word that has deep meaning for all of us – but not in the same way. So I just want to say that if throughout the service or in the discussion afterwards, you’d like to process your own feelings about safety, Rev. Louise Green and myself will be available to either talk with you after the service or make a date for sometime in the week ahead. We are about you and want you to provide a safe space for whatever comes up.

There is much coming up at All Souls in the week ahead that we’d like you to know about:

This morning, the leaders of today’s service will be hosting a discussion about today’s topic.

Information will be in the chat towards the end of the service.

This Wednesday, May 12, from 7:30 – 8:30 you’re invited to attend the monthly Vespers service, reflecting on the May theme of Blessing.

Mark your calendars for two events, sponsored by Adult Spiritual Development that are coming up next weekend: On Saturday, May 15 member Shige Sakurai will be hosting a workshop on LGBTQ inclusion. If you have been wondering about transgender and gender queer issues; would like more information in a safe and engaging environment, then please consider attending this class. You must register your intent to attend by Wednesday, May 12th.

On Sunday, May 16, at 7:00 PM, the Washington Improv Theatre has offered to lead a one hour workshop on Improv! Come check it out! IT’s free and fun.

Mark your calendar for two after hour conversations; next Sunday we’ll have the final conversation of the spring on Governance; Finding the Me in We; and on May 23, the Board will host an after hour conversation about Congregational Goals for the upcoming year. Both of these will be at 11:45 AM. We now turn our hearts and minds to the joys and cares of this community and beyond.

We start with a prayer of gratitude for all who give love as mothers, aunts, godmothers, grandmothers, mentors, in many different ways.

And we add a prayer of mourning, for all who have experienced loss and grief in fertility struggles, miscarriage, abortion, or the death of a child.

We send healing prayers to Carol Chamberlain, who returned to the hospital this week from rehab. Carol is now stabilizing with pneumonia, and her son Don is eager to get her released to a different rehab facility. Thanks to Margery Myers for her daily tending of Carol by phone.

Our hearts are with Racheal Plaskon, whose father David died last weekend. We are thinking of Racheal, spouse Clint Doggett, and young daughter Florence.

Each week there are pastoral situations held in love for those who prefer to stay unnamed publicly. There were many in recent days. This week we send blessings to:

One recovering from this week’s surgery for lung cancer.

One recently relocated here with family to seek comprehensive mental health treatment.
One suffering from heavy depression who wants to connect to a grief counselor.
One in a long diagnostic process with a rheumatologist, causing uncertainty and stress.
One who experienced an anxiety-producing head and neck MRI, which ultimately showed clear results.
One whose mother is scheduled for surgery and treatment for breast cancer.
For all these situations, and so many more, we hold the sacred space of community.
In the silence that follows, please say aloud the names of those you carry on your heart this morning. Great Spirit, our prayer today is a prayer for safety, and for peace.
We pray for a deeper understanding of what these mean, or could mean, or should mean to us as individuals, a congregation, a city, a country, a world. May we be ablaze with the fire of possibility.
We pray especially for all the mothers, and indeed all the parents, who have lost their children to the violence of war, the violence of racism, or the violence of poverty. May we be a loving presence to their grief.
Finally, we pray for the prophets of nonviolence, known and unknown, past and present, who put their hearts and minds and souls into the struggle for liberation. May we add our commitment to their courage.
Amen.

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. Bennett)

“We Keep Us Safe” (Zach Morris)

There are two ways to think about safety. There is a fear-based way and a care-based way. For the fear-based model, architects of anxiety cultivate and stoke the Us vs. Them mindset, based on a zero-sum mentality around the idea of scarcity: that there is not enough of the good stuff for everyone.

This fundamental divisive and adversarial mindset extends beyond politics (Democrats vs. Republicans), race (white vs. people of color), and class (rich vs. poor) into most institutions. In housing we have landlords vs. tenants; in the law we have plaintiffs vs. defendants; in healthcare we have insurance companies vs. patients.

When we set two sides against each other, rather than acknowledging they are components of one whole, the result is always less safety for both sides. Two-sided is always lopsided.

The fear-based model defines safety only in terms of being free from crime and criminals, which is limited, and limiting. This has resulted in a criminal legal system that holds close to seven million adult Americans in jail, in prison, on parole, or on probation.

The care-based approach asks: how do we care for ourselves and each other so that we all can be safe?

A new care-based model of safety can replace deprivation, suspicion, punishment, and isolation with resources, relationships, accountability, and participation, when taken together I call a “culture of care.” Care-based safety also means we address harms in ways that hold people accountable and bring about healing (accountability).

It means we tackle all the harms going unaddressed by the current system: on the one end of the spectrum, the really huge harms perpetrated by huge institutions, over history, and on the other end of the spectrum, the interpersonal harms like domestic violence and sexual abuse.

Sermon

Part 1 (Rev. Rolenz)

How do we care for ourselves and each other so that we all can be safe? That is the central question in Zach Morri’s provocative book, “We Keep Us Safe,” and it is really the central question the three of us, Rev. Keithan, Executive Director Traci Hughes-Trotter and I will be exploring this morning. That question, however, leads to more questions – such as “what does “care” mean? And “Who is the we?” and what does “safety” look like? These questions and more are ones that the All Souls Security Committee have been wrestling with for an entire year, leading up to the Security Policy which you may have had a chance to read.

Before I continue, I want to acknowledge that today’s topic may evoke strong feelings in some of you, because some of us have experienced physical, emotional, or spiritual harm – others have not. Some of us have experienced racialized harm because of the color of our skin or because of our ethnic or national origins. Some of us live in fear of physical or emotional harm because of our gender identity or sexual orientation. The question we will explore this morning is what are the ways we can create, as Morris describes, a culture of care vs. a culture of harm? While our experience of harm may be very diverse, I think I can say that all of us can agree – we want to feel safe – as we move about in the world, in our own communities and in our church.

Traci and Rob will be exploring this theme of “we keep us safe” from two different perspectives – but my task this morning is to reflect on the theological and spiritual aspects of safety. One of the ways we strive to keep one another safe as a religious and spiritual community is by the creating of and living into our behavioral covenants – or here at All Souls, we call A Covenant of Right Relations.

Our faith tradition is not bound together by a creed which demands a uniformity of belief. We like to quote a Unitarian ancestor from Transylvania, Francis David, who is attributed with saying “we need not think alike to love alike.” The “think” alike part is credal – but the “love

alike” part is expressed in the covenants we create to frame the ways in which we behave with one another. Covenants are not laws or policies; they are a set of promises we make which are intended to help us live into the practice of building community together. In other words, there are some behaviors which not only keep the peace as a congregation, but help to keep us safe from emotional, spiritual or theological harm. And, our covenant of right relations provides a path forward when we break those promises. Because we will. Covenants don’t protect us from all harm; but they provide a path forward to rebuild trust with one another when we fail to live up to our congregational covenant.

Listen now, to an excerpt from All Souls Covenant of Right Relations with one slight change. I’m shifting the pronoun from “we” to “I” so that we can locate ourselves in these intentions. As I read this partial list, sit with these intentions and ask yourselves: how well have I lived these out in my relationship with All Souls – or if you haven’t been with All Soul very long – in my relationship with other institutions? Meditate on these precepts now:

I will engage with those who are different than I

I will challenge bigotry in all its forms.

I will listen with respect and attention. I will speak with care.

I will assume that people have good intentions.

I will acknowledge my own and other’s imperfections.

I will be accountable for keeping my promise;

I will lovingly call one another to account for behavior that is hurtful to others.

As the Preamble to the Covenant of Right Relations states: “To covenant with one another is to engage in the spiritual and everyday practice of loving better. Although this [covenant] expresses our written promise to each other, our true covenant lives and breathes in our actions.” The covenant of right relations is the promise we make to one another. We don’t promise to never disagree; nor does it state that we should never be in conflict with one another. But it does describe HOW we are to behave with one another. Living up and into this covenant, is one way we keep one another safe,

Part 2 (Traci Hughes-Trotter)

Good morning, All Souls.

Last month, the board approved a security policy for the church that provides clarity for the staff and notice to the congregation about how we will respond if and when the church is faced with various degrees of threatening behavior.

Prompted by the January 2020 incident of an extremist group protesting outside the church, the policy makes clear that de-escalation and the non-involvement of law enforcement is the primary goal. It also emphasizes the importance of making preparations for the potential of terrorist threats and violence against the church. That is a threat that all churches, unfortunately, must take seriously.

It is important to know that every word of the policy was chosen carefully and with the keen understanding that the concept of safety — or what makes us feel safe — means different things to different people.

It is also true that the members of the security committee who drafted the policy felt particularly responsible to hold close the needs of marginalized communities who have been historically terrorized by police. At the heart of the policy is the premise that as a church, the staff, volunteers and the many communities of All Souls must begin to ground themselves in a “culture

of care” that encompasses the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of all who walk through the doors of the building.

No doubt this weighty matter of what makes us safe was a really hard and lofty topic. I’d like to acknowledge and to thank the co-chair of the security committee, Trustee Cathy Tortorici (REE-see); Trustee MJ Crom; Rose Eaton, Reverend Keithan, Emily Koechlin and Dolores Miller who hung in there with me and tackled this head on.

As a committee, we struggled with the many nuances of the concept of safety, and who decides what’s safe and why. Drafting a policy that would set the church on a slow, methodical shift toward that “culture of care” that Zach Morris so eloquently describes requires all of us....well, I will speak for myself....required ME to be real about my assumptions about what other people should or should not consider safe. When I dug in and peeled back my own curtain, I came to understand what Neil deGrasse (GRASS) Tyson describes as three truths.

Now, bear with me for just a second. No, I am not making a connection between astrophysics and safety. I happened upon something Tyson said about being open to changing your mind about what you THINK you know.

He says there are three truths: What is Personally True; What is Politically True; and what is Objectively True. My truth as I knew it in January of 2020 is looking very different today. Let me explain:

What is personally true for me is that, to date, I have not had any threatening encounters with the police; however, as a brown person in America I have always carried the thought and just the general knowing that I could at any time cross paths with the wrong officer, at the wrong time.

What is also personally true is that early on in my career I was a member of the command staff for the Metropolitan Police Department. It was my job to speak on behalf of the department and the chief of police and to spin some not-so-popular actions taken by the department. Actions that were oppressive and were disproportionately aimed at black and brown communities.

And perhaps the most important personal truth is that I was generally aware of the impetus of policing in this country but did not apprehend the depth of the harm. The harm was not happening to me or to anyone that I loved. I enjoyed, and still do, a safe detachment.

What is politically true is that I have the unique experience of witnessing law enforcement from the inside and being a cog in a bureaucratic, hierarchal and para-military system. And now I work and lead in a spiritual space when up until January of 2020 I never had to consider safety in a way that is wholistic and seeks first to care for the entire person.

So, as I stand here today, this is what I know to be objectively true: All Souls you have changed my mind about what I thought I knew. Safety is about so much more than just securing a building and the people in it. Safety as an objective is more than a mere binary action of keeping the bad people out so the good people on the inside can stay safe.

Safety requires humility and a stepping into the other’s shoes. Safety requires us to consider our own harms and wounds while holding with equal importance the harms and wounds of those in our community. Safety is an evolving consideration that calls each of us to tend to the emotional, spiritual and physical well-being of one another.

Part 3 (Rev. Keithan)

As my colleagues have already made clear, there is much work to be done in understanding and enacting a much broader definition of safety. It touches nearly all aspects of our lives—it’s deeply personal and incredibly public. It’s about physical well-being as well as spiritual well-

being. It has the slow history of centuries and the fierce urgency of daily survival.

To help guide us in all these dimensions, I want to bring us back to the words shared in our worship on April 25 by Rev. Mykal Slack. In his sermon entitled “Unleashing a Radical Imagination,” Rev. Slack told us this:

...at its most superficial... 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.

We can, and must, muster all of our creativity to imagine a future where safety is understood and approached very differently. But it's not enough for that vision to live only in the future, as if it were an impossible dream. We have to channel that future vision into action NOW. Here's some of what's possible now, final report of the DC Council's Police Reform Commission, issued on April 1st of this year:

The unifying theme of this Commission's recommendations is that to make communities safer and allow them to thrive, we must build a broader set of public safety programs, rather than over-relying on police to meet the needs of District residents. ... Only by shifting our collective focus and resources to address racialized poverty, widespread trauma, and underinvestment coupled with overpolicing in communities of color, can the District begin to create a city where everyone, not just a privileged few, feels seen, safe, and valued; a city in which thriving, not merely surviving, is within everyone's reach. [p 29]

How's that for a clear and powerful vision, coming from a government entity itself? And there is action we can take right now to make this a reality.

For the last five months, multiple social justice groups at All Souls have been working together on a coordinated advocacy campaign focused on the DC budget, because what gets funded has an enormous impact. Overall, the focus of our campaign is directing money away from the police department and towards agencies and programs that genuinely contribute to a broader definition of public safety. To carry this out, we'll be promoting actions from partner organizations AND we're creating ward-based advocacy teams, with a goal of having a direct, albeit online, meeting with as many councilmembers as possible.

Now, this may sound just like routine work to you, and you may be tempted to just let it pass by. But please consider this: if you're serious about wanting our city to have a different approach to policing and public safety, getting involved in budget advocacy like this campaign is one of the most effective and perhaps the easiest way for you to have an actual impact. In order to make bold decisions that change long-standing patterns, our elected officials need to be pushed. They need to hear directly from their constituents about what we want them to do.

And let me name this as well. When contemplating whether or not to take certain actions, I think it's easy to get stuck evaluating if a certain action will have enough impact to make it worth doing. I get that, and there is a legitimate logic to it. But there is also an oppressive logic to it, in that the dominant system doesn't want us to see ourselves as having any power. It wants us to doubt our impact so that we don't do anything. The status quo relies on us not doing anything. And while we can never be completely sure of the effectiveness of our actions, we can be 100%

sure of this: that doing nothing does nothing. Let me say that again: we can be 100% sure that doing nothing does nothing.

Let's put that positively as well: doing something does something. Doing something does something. Say it with me: doing something does something.

And in this case, when we take actions with partner organizations or through our own advocacy teams, whether it's through emails or call-in days or visits with councilmembers or their staff, we KNOW that we are doing something. And at this unprecedented time in history, when all these visits will be happening remotely over video, it's literally possible to do an effective lobby visit while not wearing any pants. Regardless of the choices you make on the subject of pants, I hope you'll sign up to be part of a Ward Advocacy Team. And there will be a kickoff meeting for this budget campaign after church on Sunday May 23. The link to sign up for a team and to RSVP for the May 23rd kickoff is in the chat.

In conclusion, let me just say that there's no guarantee that our efforts will be successful, but that's never a guarantee with organizing. We don't do it because victory is assured, we do it because it's the right thing to do, and peoples lives and livelihoods are at stake. And, in this case and many others, we do it because it's what organizations and communities are asking us to do. It's time for us, as a congregation, as a city, and as country, to level up. To make serious changes to address serious problems. Internally and externally, let's do what needs to be done to keep all of us safe.

Amen.

Anthem (All Souls Jubilee Singers)

“A Peaceful Place” (Richard Smallwood)

What we need is more love
What we need is more peace
We need harmony in a world of division
Poverty, pestilence and war
Perplexment and indecision
We need to get together
And make this land a peaceful place
We need to make this land a peaceful place
Make this land a peaceful place
If we could live as brothers, giving help to one another,
If we shared each others sorrows we would bring brighter tomorrows.
We've got to fix it before it's too late
Rid ourselves of malice and hate.
We need to get together and make this land a peaceful place.

Offertory (Rev. Rolenz)

Greetings All Souls! I've been your interim senior minister for ten months and I have to say – I have been touched and impressed by so many aspects of All Souls culture. As a congregation, you've been extraordinarily kind and supportive – not just to me, but to the staff and to one another. You've challenged me and yourselves in all the right ways – to dig deeper into my and

our own unexamined biases; to call out theological laziness, and to keep showing up, week after week, even in spite of Zoom fatigue. So now it's my time to challenge you to be generous in your financial contribution to the church and make your pledge for the 2021-2022 church year. Some of you attended yesterdays' budget hearing and were privy to the hopes and aspirations for our 2021-2022 budget. We heard that you – the congregation – want to ensure the quality of worship service, religious education, and programs that you have come to expect in the year ahead. We have heard that you value our staff and want to ensure that we keep them. And – we heard that you wanted to celebrate All Souls history while investing in the future. All of this is possible and attainable – but it also relies completely on you.

In order to make this happen – All Souls – all members – must pledge or make a financial contribution to the church. There's no way around that truth. For those of you who have already made your pledge for the upcoming year – THANK YOU.

For those of you who have not yet pledged because you think your pledge would be too insignificant to make a difference – please know that every pledge matters – just as every person matters. For those of you who have not yet paid on last year's pledge – PLEASE DO SO NOW. If we were doing a fund-raiser on TV, I'd say “and operators and standing by to take your pledge right now!” But, we're on Zoom, so what I can say is that the link to a pledge form is on the chat now. And, if you want to know about your current pledge and how much you still owe on it, direct message Traci right now and she'll get back to you as soon as possible. Whatever you do – take action now – be bold, be courageous, be loving and be generous. I expect nothing less of and from you. Thank you in advance for your generosity!

Hymn 1017

“We Are Building a New Way”

We are building a new way.
We are building a new way.
We are building a new way,
Feeling stronger every day.
We are building a new way.
We are working to be free.
We are working to be free.
We are working to be free,
Hate and greed and jealousy,
We are working to be free.
We can feed our every need.
We can feed our every need.
We can feed our every need.
Start with love, that is the seed.
Peace and freedom is our cry.
Peace and freedom is our cry.
Peace and freedom is our cry.
Without these the world will die.
Peace and freedom is our cry.
We can feed our every need.

Benediction (Rev. Rolenz)

Music (All Souls Jubilee Singers)

“I Dream a World” (Andre Thomas; words by Langston Hughes)

Of such I dream, of such I dream.
Of such I dream, of such I dream.
Of such I dream.

I dream a world where man
No other man will scorn,
Where love will bless the earth
And peace its paths adorn.

I dream a world where all
Will know sweet freedom’s way,
Where greed no longer saps the soul
Nor avarice blights our day.

A world I dream where black or white,
Whatever race you be,
Will share the bounties of the earth
And every man is free,

Of such I dream, of such I dream.
Of such I dream, of such I dream.
Of such I dream.

Where wretchedness will hang its head
And joy, like a pearl, attends the needs of all mankind.
Of such I dream, of such I dream, of such I dream.
I dream a world.