

Worship transcript for May 30, 2021

Prelude (Gordon Kent, Jen Hayman, and Rochelle Rice)

“Freedom for the Stallion” (Allen Toussaint)

Freedom for the stallion
Freedom for the mare and her colt
Freedom for the baby child
Who has not grown old enough to vote
Lord, have mercy, what you gonna do about the people who are praying to you?
They got men making laws that destroy other men,
They’ve made money “God”, it’s a doggone sin,
Oh, Lord, you got to help us find the way
Big ship’s a-sailing, slaves all chained and bound,
Heading for a brand new land that some cat said he upped and found
Lord, have mercy, what you gonna do about the people who are praying to you?
They got men making laws that destroy other men,
They’ve made money “God”It’s a doggone sin
Oh, Lord, you got to help us find the way
Some sing a sad song
Some got to moan the blues
Trying to make the best of a home
That the man didn’t even get to choose
Lord, have mercy, how you gonna be with people like John and me
They’ve got men building fences to keep other men out
Ignore him if he whispers and kill him if he shouts
Oh, Lord, you got to help us find the way
Oh, Lord, you got to help them find the way
Oh, Lord, you got to help us find the way

Call to Worship (Rev. Rob Keithan)

For healing and for wholeness,
For inspiration and motivation,
For love and for liberation,
Come, let us worship together.
I’m pleased now to introduce our chalice lighters, Marleise and Jim Pastore.

Chalice Lighting (Marleise and Jim Pastore)

Intro to Hymn (Jen Hayman)

Hymn

“When the Spirits Say Do”

You've got to do when the spirit says 'do'
You've got to do when the spirit says 'do'
When the spirit says 'do', you've gotta do, o Lord
You've got to do when the spirit says 'do'

You've got to sing when the spirit says 'sing'...

You've got to dance when the spirit says 'dance'...

You've got to do when the spirit says 'do'...

Welcome (Paree Roper)

Good morning, and welcome to All Souls! My name is XXXX, I use XX/XX pronouns, and I'm honored to be your worship associate today.

In an effort to acknowledge and support Indigenous communities, it is important to recognize the people who lived on the land where our church now stands. The closest village was Nacotchtank [Na-COTCH-tank], from which the name Anacostia is derived. They were part of the Piscataway [Pis-SCAT-away] group of tribes [Note: speak all three names slowly to allow the ASL interpreter to spell them].

We acknowledge that indigeneous peoples were here before us, are here with us now, and will continue to be with us, as we look forward to the future. Let's take a moment of silence to reflect on whose land we each reside, in our individual and collective locations around the U.S. and our planet Earth. [Silence]

Now is the time in our service when, if we were together in the building, we would turn and warmly greet one another. Since moving online, we've adapted this to what we call "beholding." If you feel so moved, please turn on your camera, turn your Zoom to gallery view, and scroll through the pages of beautiful souls, say hello in the chat, and behold one another as we continue to create community together.

Announcements and Prayer (Rev. Louise Green)

Hello everyone, I am Rev. Louise Green, your All Souls Minister of Congregational Care.

We ask all members to register today for our annual public congregational meeting, next Sunday, June 6, at 1 pm. People, this gathering is the power of partnership: 200 years of All Souls autonomy, in the Congregationalist tradition of governing our own church. Our way of governing comes from 16th century Protestant traditions, all claiming more power — over church money, elected leadership, and how to be as community. If you are a voting member, and have made any donation in the last 15 months, we urge you to show up and take part. This is one way we create the congregation we need to be in the world today.

On Sunday, June 20, from 2-5 we will have a live Summer Solstice celebration, outside on the All Souls Church grounds. There will be Akoma @ All Souls drumming, a lively market, children's activities, dance and ritual on the playground, and even a juggler. We hope to welcome the Sun and you on that day!

Each week we name people and situations into this sacred circle and time.

We celebrate the major milestone birthday on May 24 for our Interim Senior Minister, Rev. Kathleen Rolenz, and hope the trip to Colorado has been celebratory! Kathleen will also now be spending part of the week in a D.C. apartment, so welcome to Columbia Heights.

We offer sincere condolences to Ken Quam, who is mourning the death of Robert, his partner Rachel's father. We are also sending love to Virginia, Rachel's mother, in this time of transition.

More sad condolences to Bill and Shebbie Rice. Bill's mother, Ella Elizabeth Johnson Rice, died Thursday morning in hospice care at Howard Hospital. Our love to Bill and Shebbie, and the extended family who mourns.

Dolores Miller has created beautiful children's lessons today to create Memory Gardens for five All Souls members. We recall them each with love and thanks for their many contributions to the congregation: David Bauer, Tom Hargrave, Loretta Carter Hanes, Bob Freeman, and Cathy Long.

Holding in our hearts some significant and painful anniversaries this week.

The passing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, May 25, 2020, one year ago in violent police action that led to his horrific death.

The Tulsa Greenwood Massacre, 100 years ago, by a White mob over two days of violence, May 31 and June 1, 1921. This violence resulted in hundreds of Black deaths and the destruction of an entire vibrant community.

Our hearts are with all those who remember and mourn this Memorial Day, begun by public events in 1865 that decorated thousands of Civil War graves with flowers. We now honor all U.S. veterans, with great thanks for the national service which cost them their lives and caused so much grief to family and friends. We remember with gratitude those in active duty serving today, including the extended military families dealing with multiple challenges in these times.

Your names and situations, into the chat, or in your heart and mind....

Would you meditate or pray with me?

Loving Spirit of Life, Holy One of Many Names, we pause on the threshold of summer to celebrate and to grieve. We are here, alive and aware, while so many have passed away. Remembering what has been lost, lamenting what has been destroyed, we tune in to appreciate more deeply, right in this moment.

We are grateful for the accompaniment of beloveds—friends, family, congregations and communities, our animal companions, the richness of Nature unfolding now. For the sacred work of understanding histories well-known, and all that is more newly named and proclaimed. For the personal stories and legacies of people that we mourn and cherish. For all the ways we create and celebrate, that we might remember and honor what has passed away.

On this Memorial Day weekend, let us pray for collective unity in deeper awareness. May we find the individual strength and wisdom to make a way forward. Blessed Be and 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.

Sermon (Rev. Keithan)

“The Power of Partnership”

This sermon is several years in the making, in the sense that the idea comes from conversations with the Beckner Advancement Fund Committee about their work. And I don’t think we’ve told the story of the Beckner Fund anytime recently, so I want to start by doing that.

Actually, maybe I should back up a bit. Or, fast forward—I’m not sure which—for folks who may not have any idea what I’m talking about. The short summary is this—the church has a dedicated endowment, called the Beckner Advancement Fund, that gives away about \$100,000 every year—typically about \$70,000 to small social justice organizations in Washington, DC, and \$30,000 to social justice groups at All Souls. The Fund has a 10-hour per week Program Officer and a 9-person committee that makes funding recommendations to the Board of Trustees. The slideshow before the service today highlighted the 11 external groups that received grants earlier this year. The current Program Officer is Ruth Goins, she started this past December and is fantastic.

As context for the focus today, on the power of partnership, I want to re-visit a framework I offered in a sermon in November 2017. The central question I addressed was what it would like to go from being Religiously Liberal to being Religiously Liberating. One of the central quotes was from the Reverend Mark Morrison-Reed, a Unitarian Universalist minister, African American, and author of *Black Pioneers in a White Denomination*, and I want to share it again. Morrison writes that liberalism and liberation are “two distinct models of freedom. Liberalism focuses on providing opportunities for individuals to be free, while liberation is an ongoing struggle to create and restore relationships that free people and communities from systems of oppression.” [i]

Let me say that again: “liberation is an ongoing struggle to create and restore relationships that free people and communities from systems of oppression.”

These were the four observations I offered about a liberation model.

First, liberation is collective. It requires a collective perspective and collective analysis.

Second, as Morrison-Reed highlights, liberation is relational.

Third, liberation is embodied. We literally have to feel it, in our bodies. And not just anger and outrage, but joy as well.

And that’s the fourth point: that liberation is joyful. Yes, we have to work on hard issues together, but we also need to have fun doing it. Because ultimately, if there’s no joy in the work, we’re not going to keep doing it.

I want to bring these observations into the present context, invoking words spoken by Rev. William H, Lamar IV, pastor of Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C. He was a featured speaker at a recent Washington Interfaith Network presentation on racial equity and black wealth in DC.

Rev. Lamar said that, quite simply, the problem we face is that “organized power always shows up, but organized people don’t.” And he went on to say that “Relational power is joy!” Relational power is joy. And relational power is how we practice solidarity.

Hold that thought, as we turn now to the story of the Beckner Fund. My source is a history of the Fund prepared by Maurine Mulliner, a longtime member of All Souls who served on the very first Beckner Fund Advisory Committee.

Both Earl Rucker Beckner and Meta Schroeder Beckner had doctorates; he in economics and her in preventative medicine. They were married in 1926. One of the defining features of their life, which led directly to the endowment, is that he was a diabetic. In fact, in 1980 he was recognized as the oldest living diabetic on insulin in the world.

You might have a lot of ideas about how or why the Beckners were able to make such a generous gift. But here’s the truth: although he worked as an economist for the federal government for

most of his career, because he had diabetes he was excluded from the Civil Service Retirement System. They invested in real estate so that they had a safety net for themselves. They bought, renovated with their own hands, and rented houses in Alexandria. When they were economically stable was also when Earl was starting to lose his eyesight, and the maintenance of the properties became too much. After a series of conversations, they decided to give the properties to the church, in part because they liked the direction Rev. David Eaton was going. Nor did they want recognition; the gift was anonymous for the first 9 years.

The gift was announced the congregation on January 6, 1974, by the President of the Board, Meredith Higgins who is still active here. Her daughter, Anna Higgins Hargrave is finishing her term on the Beckner Advisory Committee this June. And, just so you know, we're currently recruiting for 4 new members.

In her announcement, Meredith said "The donors suggest the following broad purposes: To enhance the influence of All Souls Church in the Washington metropolitan area; to make the immediate community in which the Church is located a more cohesive, attractive, and forward-looking community; to draw people of all ages and backgrounds to All Souls Church, and to foster human rights and dignity. It is the strong of those concerned that the income of the Fund...not be applied to support programs and services normally included in the ordinary operating budget of the Church."

After maintenance costs, the gross income in the first year—1976—was—wait for it—\$2,000. But several years later, after a discussion on whether to maintain them as affordable housing or invest and grant the money, the properties were sold. The endowment is now more than 1 million, and as I said we give away approximately \$100,000 every year.

Over the past few years, the Committee has gone through a process of clarifying its values and objectives. There are five values, which are (along with lots of additional information) are on the church website. I want to name them, with just a sentence from their descriptions:

Centering community: We believe that the best solutions to enduring social problems come from the people who experience them.

Pursuing justice: We aim to invest in systemic solutions that create equitable opportunities for these communities to thrive.

Catalyzing initiatives: We use our limited resources to seed new initiatives and accelerate the expansion of existing projects that employ fresh approaches to social justice work.

Continually learning: We approach our mission with an honest spirit of inquiry and a vocation for learning alongside the communities we partner with.

Approaching challenges with hope: While the problems we address are serious and challenging, we approach our work with excitement and a hope that our engagement will make a positive impact.

Although all this may sound great, and much of it is, I also want to name a tension. It's a tension at the intersection of being liberal v. liberating.

The Beckners had a forward-looking vision, for sure. They wanted us to support new programs and approaches rather than established organizations, and there's a logic to that. However, when we listen to the feedback from small organizations led by members of impacted communities, they're not asking us to fund only new things; only special projects or new initiatives. What they want and need is consistent support for the work that THEY identify as needed—not what we think is new or special. And so the committee has been, and continues, to wrestle with the ethical obligation to stay faithful to the donor's intent and our calling to center and support leadership on the ground. We're looking at multi-year grants, reducing the bureaucracy, and other ways to make the process easier.

However, it's not just about the money. For most if not all of the Beckner committee, and certainly for me, the highlight of the year is meeting with grantees directly to hear about their work. And what they say, again and again, is that they want more of a relationship that just money. They want Beckner Committee members and All Souls Church members to participate in their events. To show up and be part of their community.

Let me go back to what Rev. Bill Lamar said. In addition to saying that “Relational power is joy!” he also said that “relational power is how we practice solidarity.”

All Souls Social Justice Ministry had a strong emphasis on relational organizing when Rev. Louise Green was heading it up in the 20 oughts, and I'm coming back around to how important that it. It's a major focus of our work now, and might be for the entire congregation—not just the social ministry—next year.

What I want to emphasize now is one of the most important things about relational power, and the concept of partnership generally, which is that it invites, and encourages, self-awareness and specialization. That's the great gift of partnership—in addition to not having to do the work along, you get to focus on what you're good at! You can't do it all, or be it all, and you don't have to!

Partnerships are not about every person or every institution doing the same things in the same ways. That's not a good use of resources, and frankly it sounds pretty boring. The effectiveness and the joy come from the alchemy of being different and using those differences creatively.

The place where I've navigated this path is that, prior to and in addition to my ministry here at All Souls, I work in reproductive health, rights, and justice organizing. In many of those settings, I'm one of the only men, and/or one of the only white people, and/or one of the only clergy in the room. Or, these days, in the zoom.

I have spent a lot of energy trying to figure out how, if at all, I fit into those spaces in ways that are appropriate and accountable. And that work continues, as it should. However, the work has also forced me to do some important soul-searching about my own strengths and limitations, and about how to have enough confidence in myself that others don't have to caretaker me. And what

I've found is that my skill and genuine love of organization—like creating summaries and tables and timelines, and google docs and email groups, and paying attention to details—is a very welcome contribution to many teams I'm a part of. Once relationship and trust is established, folks are happy and grateful for me to run with those things. So they feel good that they don't have to do it, and I feel good because I get to do it! Partnership for the win.

This works on institutional levels as well. I've been a part of many coalition efforts where a faith caucus helped bring a strong moral voice to a secular issue, like working on the Equality Act for LGBT civil rights. In interfaith groups, like the Washington Interfaith Network, different congregations have different relationships and opportunities on issues. And last October, the All Souls Reeb Project for Voting Rights partnered with Empower DC, a Beckner grantee, to do voter mobilization calls to their entire database—something that they had never done before and would not have done without a partner.

Before I close, I want to say a special word of thanks to the outgoing members of the Beckner Committee. These folks held steady through significant struggle and transition. So a big thanks to Anna Higgins Hargrave, Alan Abramson and especially to Marleise Pastore, who as co-chair did an incredible amount of work when the Fund was between Program Officers.

As closing, I want to offer a vision and a hope. As we're coming up on our 200th anniversary as a congregation this November, it's an important time to reflect on the role we play in the larger community. How do we want to be known? What does it mean to be a prophetic church in 2021 in Washington, DC? These are questions we should continue to discuss, but I feel confident in giving this answer: we want to be good partners. That's my vision and my hope for our social justice ministry going forward—that we are known as good partners. Not as self-righteous folks who go our way, and not as passive followers, but as people who know what we bring to the table and what we don't. People who show up when we need to, and support leadership from impacted communities. People who apologize when we make mistakes, and learn, and change. People who keep going when the work is hard. And people who have fun with it.

May it be so.

Anthem (All Souls Choir)

“One Voice” (Ruth Moody)

This is the sound of one voice
One spirit, one voice
The sound of one who makes a choice
This is the sound of one voice

This is the sound of voices two
The sound of me singing with you
Helping each other to make it through
This is the sound of voices two

This is the sound of voices three
Singing together in harmony
Surrendering to the mystery
This is the sound of voices three

This is the sound of all of us
Singing with love and the will to trust
Leave the rest behind it will turn to dust
This is the sound of all of us

This is the sound of one voice
One people, one voice
A song for every one of us
This is the sound of one voice
This is the sound of one voice

Offertory (James Ploeser)

Now is the time in our service when we reflect on how much this community means to us, we reflect on the meaning of giving, and we consider how much we can give back to this community.

I give to this church for several reasons:

- 1) This church community supports me in ways that are deeply sustaining. From the depths of hard life events such as job loss and bereavement to the boundless joy on the faces at our wedding ceremony, I have received countless gifts of care and love from the people of this congregation and am grateful for what had been given to me.
- 2) Our presence is needed. In choir, we often sing the song "I Need You To Survive," Our community needs us as well. The spiritual work, social justice actions and partnerships we make here at All Souls are important and necessary for putting more good energy into the world.
- 3) Finally, I want this church to be around long after I am gone. All Souls is an anchor for me and for so many. May we be generous now so that the anchor can hold for those yet to come.

Please look to the chat box for instructions on how to give to this week's offering, as well as how to make a pledge to our annual campaign.

This morning's offering will now be gratefully received.

Hymn 95

"There Is More Love Somewhere"

There is more love somewhere
There is more love somewhere
I'm gonna keep on till I find it
There is more love somewhere

There is more hope somewhere...

There is more joy somewhere...

There is more love somewhere...

Benediction (Rev. Keithan)

“Liberation is an ongoing struggle to create and restore relationships that free people and communities from systems of oppression.” May we dedicate and re-dedicate ourselves to this holy and joyful work.

Amen.

Music (Women’s 8 Ensemble)

“That’s What Friends Are For” (Burt Bacharach; arr. by Trey McLaughlin)

And I never thought I’d feel this way,
And as far as I’m concerned,
I’m glad I got the chance to say
That I do believe I love you

And if I should ever go away
Well, then close your eyes and try
To feel the way we do today
And if you can remember

Keep smilin’, keep shinin’
Knowing you can always count on me, for sure
That’s what friends are for
For good times and bad times,
I’ll be on your side forever more
That’s what friends are for

Well, you came in loving me
And now there’s so much more I see
And so by the way, I thank you
Oh, and then for the times when we’re apart
Just close your eyes and know
These words are coming from my heart
And then if you can remember

Keep smilin’, keep shinin’
Knowing you can always count on me, for sure
That’s what friends are for

For good times and bad times,
I'll be on your side forever more
That's what friends are for

I'll be there, I'll be there
Just call my name and I'll be there
I'll be there, I'll be there
Just call my name and I'll be there

Just look over your shoulder, honey