

Worship Transcript for August 29, 2021

“We Shall Not Cease from Exploration”

Worship leaders: Rev. Rob Keithan

Liturgist: Rev. Kathleen Rolenz

Worship Associate: [Kathleen?]

Music: Women's 6

Coffee Hour: Gary Penn

ASL Interpreter: Mia Engle

CAM on Musicians | Women's 6 *Prelude*

“Bring Me Little Water, Sylvie” by Huddie Ledbetter, arr. Moira Smiley, sung by Women's 6

Bring me little water, Sylvie
Bring me little water now
Bring me little water, Sylvie
Every little once in a while

Bring it in a bucket, Sylvie
Bring it in a bucket now
Bring it in a bucket, Sylvie
Every little once in a while

Sylvie come a runnin', bucket in my hand
I will bring a little water fast as I can

Bring me little water, Sylvie
Bring me little water now
Bring me little water, Sylvie
Every little once in a while

Can't you see me comin'? Can't you see me now?
I will bring a little water every little once in a while

Bring me little water, Sylvie
Bring me little water now
Bring me little water, Sylvie
Every little once in a while

CAM on Pulpit | Rob *Call To Worship*

Whoever you are,
Wherever you are on your journey, and
Whatever twists and turns your journey has taken,
You are welcome here.
Come, let us worship together.

[Pause]

We now kindle our chalice flame as an act of connection with our larger faith community.

CAM on Floor | Kathleen *Chalice Lighting*

CAM on Music Leader | Jen *Hymn Intro*

CAM on Musicians | Women's 6 *100 I've Got Peace Like a River*

I've got peace like a river, I've got peace like a river
I've got peace like a river in my soul
(Repeat)
I've got joy like a fountain...
I've got love like an ocean...
I've got pain like an arrow...
I've got strength like a mountain...

CAM on Pulpit | Liturgist *Welcome & Land Acknowledgement*

Welcome to All Souls Church Unitarian. My name is Jana Owens and I will be serving as one of your worship leaders today - my pronouns are she-hers. Welcome to this place where ALL people — people of all races, national origins, creeds, gender identities and expressions, sexual orientations, ages and disabilities—where ALL people are welcome at this table of love and fellowship.

This Sunday marks the beginning of our first test run at simultaneously live-streaming from the sanctuary and running Zoom worship. Serving as liturgist this morning is Rev. Kathleen Rolenz; providing music is Jen Hayman and the Women's 6 ensemble. Out of concern for everyone's safety, everyone, except for our ASL interpreter and Rev. Rob Keithan will remain masked throughout the service.

We extend a special greeting to those joining us for the first time and those who have continued to attend weekly! Although the building has been closed, church programs have never stopped. Our weekly email bulletin is the best way to find out the latest news; you can sign up through [the link](#) posted in the chat or visit All Souls website.

(Take a pause here)

It is important to recognize the people who lived on the land where our church now stands. The closest village was Nacotchtank, from which the name Anacostia is derived. They were part of the Piscataway group of First Nations Peoples on this land. As we reflect on our role in building the beloved community, we summon our communal strength to inter-cultural acts of love, across the ethno-cultural spectrum of humanity, to include our First Nation's siblings.

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

Now we will greet each other in a time of "beholding." If you feel so moved, please turn on your camera, put your Zoom on the gallery view, and scroll through the pages of beautiful souls. You can wave, say hello in the chat, and *behold* one another as we continue to create online community, together. For those of us in the sanctuary, we send our love and greetings to you!

CAM on Musicians | Women's 6 *Anthem*

"Wading in Waist High Water" by Robin Pecknold, sung by Women's 6

Summer all over, blame it on timing
Weakening August water
Loose-eyed in morning, sunlight covered over,
Waiting in sight of fire
And we're finally aligning
More than maybe I can choose

Soon as I knew you, all so wide open
Wading inside of fire
As if I just saw you cross Second Avenue
Wading in waist high water
And I love you so madly

More than maybe I can do

And we're finally aligning
More than maybe I can choose

CAM on Pulpit | Kathleen

Announcements, Concerns, Prayer

I'm Rev. Kathleen Rolenz, serving as your Interim Senior Minister and liturgist for today's service. There is many programs and possibilities for spiritual practice which you should know about. Here are few th

Next **Sunday, September 5, at 10:30 AM**, Rev. Keithan and I will host a "Questions of Faith" sermon; which is a service built around the questions YOU submit. For those of you who haven't experienced this kind of service before, members ask questions of their ministers and we give you the best of our thinking in real time. Please send in your questions to krolenz@allsouls.ws - ideally - by this evening!

Your ministry team and All Souls Staff have been gearing up to welcome you back to one of our two Homecoming Sundays **on September 12th and September 19th**. An article describing the details of how we plan to do this so as to be inclusive and safe can be found in the weekly e-newsletter and on the church's website. We plan to live-stream the in-person worship service so that those who wish to join us virtually - both far or near - can stay connected to All Souls. There is also a detailed plan for ensuring that children and families can return to Religious Education safely.

For now, we continue to proceed cautiously and mindfully. If we feel we cannot gather safely in person we will let you know via the e-newsletter and website.

And now, take a moment to put away what the Buddhists call, "the ten thousand things," and steep yourself in a moment of silence. Put down the multi-tasking for just a moment - listen, as if you were seated next to a gentle flowing river - and breathe with me.

Oh Spirit of Life, that moves in, amongst and beyond us - be with us now.

In the holy silence of this moment, we hold in care all those who lost their lives in Kabul this week - but particularly, the thirteen United States service members who died. We grieve these losses with their family, friends and loved ones.

We hold in prayer all those who were injured in the attack; for those who are struggling to leave Afghanistan and those who cannot leave but who fear for their lives and their country. May we open our hearts for all refugees fleeing violence and persecution.

Closer to home, we are aware of the growing climate crisis made evident to us through out of control wildfires, of rain which turn to floods, to rising temperatures. For all those in harm's way, particularly those in New Orleans facing Hurricane Ida on the 16th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, we pray.

We recognize the importance of voting rights and will soundly, firmly and forever reject any efforts which attempt to discourage, deny or suppress the right to vote.

Turning now to those among and beyond us - we hold in heart and mind Catharine Clarenbach, a UU minister in Portland OR who is All Souls member and ordained here, has been on a hard roller coaster summer. She would like to be in All Souls prayers...

And within our own community, we send healing prayers to Rev. Louise Green, who had surgery for a broken ankle this past week; and Dolores Miller, who is recovering from eye surgery.

Oh, there is so much struggle and suffering; and there is also strength and resilience which is also in, among and beyond us. May we remember the ancient words that weeping may endure through the night, but joy comes in the morning. May we find that joy - this morning. O Spirit of Life, come unto us. Amen.

CAM on Musicians | Women's 6

Spirit of Life

Fuente de amor, ven hacia mi
Y al corazón cántale tu compasión
Sopla al volar, sube en la mar
Hasta moldear la justicia de la vida
Arraígame, libérame
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.

CAM on Chalice | Moment of Silence

CAM on Pulpit | Rob Reading

[For all those joys and concerns named and unnamed, we hold in our hearts this day...]

Our reading this morning is called *History of Desire*, by Tony Hoagland. It speaks humorously to the unexpected and perhaps unwanted patterns of our journeys, and offers an insight into how we can relate better to our own past.

History of Desire by Tony Hoagland

When you're seventeen, and drunk
on the husky, late-night flavor
of your first girlfriend's voice
along the wires of the telephone

what else to do but steal
your father's El Dorado from the drive,
and cruise out to the park on Driscoll Hill?
Then climb the county water tower

and aerosol her name in spraycan orange
a hundred feet above the town?
Because only the letters of that word,
DORIS, next door to yours,

in yard-high, iridescent script,
are amplified enough to tell the world
who's playing lead guitar
in the rock band of your blood.

You don't consider for a moment
the shock in store for you in 10 A.D.,
a decade after Doris, when,
out for a drive on your visit home,

you take the Smallville Road, look up

and see RON LOVES DORIS
still scorched upon the reservoir.
This is how history catches up—

by holding still until you
bump into yourself.
What makes you blush, and shove
the pedal of the Mustang

almost through the floor
as if you wanted to spray gravel
across the features of the past,
or accelerate into oblivion?

Are you so out of love that you
can't move fast enough away?
But if desire is acceleration,
experience is circular as any

Indianapolis. We keep coming back
to what we are—each time older,
more freaked out, or less afraid.
And you are older now.

You should stop today.
In the name of Doris, stop.

CAM on Pulpit | Rob *Sermon*

Since the very first time I heard it several years ago, I've been able to recite these lines from the poem, word for word:

This is how history catches up—
by holding still until you
bump into yourself.

They just immediately struck me, and still do, as capturing something so true about how life ACTUALLY happens, as opposed to how we might hope or want it to happen. And it begs the questions: How do we respond when things don't turn out the way we expect? What happens when we bump into ourselves?

There are ways to take these questions individually, but I think there's a collective dimension as well—especially with Covid restrictions coming back again. How do we cope with having to return to a place we never wanted to be in the first place? Right Proper Brewing Company in Brookland has a sign on their door that sums it well. In red letters, all capitalized as if angrily shouting its message, it reads: “We all have to wear stupid masks again”.

Whether it's the pandemic or not, because some parts of our lives are more circular than linear, we're inevitably forced to wrestle with being back at places we never wanted to be, or expected to be.

I had an interesting bumping into myself moment on a family vacation earlier this month. We were going with another family that has two girls the same ages as ours, and they suggested spending a few days in South central Pennsylvania and going to Dutch Wonderland, an amusement park made for younger kids. The place we ended up staying turned out to be smack dab in the heart of Amish Country.

Although I grew up in Harrisburg, less than an hour's drive from there, my family never spent much time in Amish Country. I was both curious about intersecting with Amish culture and cautious about how to do so respectfully. Paging through a tourism magazine at the house, I saw an advertisement for a place with the website www.amishexperience.com.

Really? To me, this is akin to the theological concept that certain entities transcend words, and the instant they are put into language they are no longer complete. Like what Lao Tzu said of the Dao: “Dao that can be told, or described in words is not the Eternal Dao”.^[i]

I identify as a religious humanist, and this approach to God resonates with me. If God is, whatever God is must be so vast that it cannot be adequately captured in words. That doesn't mean we shouldn't talk about God, it just means that we need to do so with the recognition and humility that we don't have and can't have the full picture.

Anyway, the existence of a www.amishexperience.com website struck me as blatantly missing the point—if you're going to a website about the Amish experience, you're not going to have an Amish experience.

And, it turned out, we didn't need a business venture to encounter Amish people. We were in their community, and Amish people were everywhere going about their daily lives while we passed through for our short stay. As a kid, I definitely remember thinking that it was ridiculous to choose that way of life, without modern technology.

But thinking about it now, as an adult in a bustling city who is rarely separated from smartphone and computer, there are aspects of the simple life that sounds pretty darn good! And there's a flourishing movement of people, of diverse racial identities, and in urban, suburban, and rural areas, who are more focused on growing and raising their own food. There's clearly an appeal to this simplicity.

I don't think there's anything good about the COVID-19 pandemic, but there's potential for good to come from it. Some of that is about concrete actions and behavior, but some of it is also about our plans and expectations, and specifically our ability to adapt. And some of you know, either through conversations with me or by reading the personal message at the end of June, my family has experienced a great challenge this past year besides COVID.

In mid-May of last year, my wife Mandy started having a strange assortment of debilitating health symptoms. A week in, we found the telltale sign of Lyme Disease—the red bullseye pattern around a tick bite. Catching it within a week or two is considered pretty early, and for most people the powerful anti-biotics clear it up within 2-4 weeks. Unfortunately, Mandy is one of the unlucky few to get a long-haul case. She was bedridden for nearly 3 months, and even now—more than 15 months since diagnosis—she is far from recovered. She's left her job to focus what energy she has on parenting. And it's still common for fatigue and other symptoms to be so acute that she spends one or more days in bed.

For most of this time, our kids have been ages 2 and 5. How such small people can generate so many dirty dishes is still shocking to me. And here at All Souls (it's nice to be able to say here), I've been supporting the church's transition of senior ministers, helping us navigate the challenges of COVID, and working to ensure that our social justice ministry remains vital and effective at supporting people in need and challenging the colonialism and white supremacy that pervades our cultures and institutions.

So, to state the obvious, it has been a very difficult and tiring year. On top of the challenges and restrictions of COVID, my family has had to navigate a whole additional level of obstacles and complexities. As with COVID overall, I would never say that it's good but there are good things that have come from it—mostly out of necessity.

In previous times, without the variables of COVID and what's officially known as Post-Lyme Disease Syndrome, it was usually possible to encounter a variable or obstacle in a plan, make a quick change, and then carry-on with minimal disruption. There was a value in that, but it also had a momentum that carried us at an

unsustainable speed. Rarely did the variables or obstacles cause us to slow down, even when they should have.

With COVID and Lyme, however, we kept running into situations where no back-up plan would work. Not the first back-up plan, or the second, or even the 3rd or 4th in some cases. As the poet said:

If desire is acceleration,
experience is circular as any
Indianapolis.

We could not out-smart the situation. Again and again, we bumped into our own unreasonable expectations. We could not find a logistical solution. The only solution was a mental one, and an emotional one—we had to plan to do far, far less. We had to focus on the basics of getting through each day, and be grateful for any time we had the energy or flexibility to do anything more.

My sense is that these experiences, and lessons, are generally relevant to all of us as we negotiate the pandemic as well. There are so many aspects of the changes and restrictions that we cannot out-smart, or out-run. And the Delta variant is unfortunately proving that even vaccination does not offer the solution we'd hoped for.

So, in the face of this, I think it's appropriate and healthy to work on adjusting our expectations. For everything, including and especially ourselves. We can't live in the same ways, or do things in the same ways, and for some activities we have no idea when, or if, we'll be able to do them again. We can try putting the pedal to the metal and speeding away from this reality, or we can try crashing through it. But my sense is that we'll be much better served if we stop. If we just stop, and try to find ways to live and love and have fun with what we have. If we focus on what we can do, not what we cannot.

Now, given this statement, the title of my sermon—"We shall not cease from exploration"—might seem confusing. So let me say more about it. It's from a reading in our hymnal, excerpted from an epic poem by T.S. Eliot, who was a Unitarian, call [Little Gidding](#), which itself is the 4th installment of a quartet of poems.

The excerpted version in our hymnal reads:

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.

I'm guessing that these lines, or perhaps this concept, are familiar to you—that an end is a beginning. But there's a second stanza in the reading:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

Now, exploration typically means that we're going off somewhere else, like pioneers or something. But Eliot's point isn't about discovering new places somewhere else. He's talking about a deeper understanding and deeper appreciation for where we already are. What we already have.

This resonated with me so much because it assumes a circularity to our paths, in a positive and fulfilling way. Perhaps this is a potential silver lining in these moments, including learning to live with new restrictions—we might find new depths and new joy in what we already have.

The bad news of a circular path is that you've already been through it once. And it may not be something you want to repeat.

But here's the good news about the circular path. We've already been through it once! And we made it through that time, so we can make it through again. Another positive opportunity is that we can reinvent ourselves. In some cases, we get do overs. We can be compassionate with our previous selves, learn what we can, and try again.

Also, we have options. If our initial plans don't work out, and maybe our back-up plans fail too, we can keep trying to see if plan 3 or plan 4 will work. However, we also have the option to give ourselves some space and say: do I really need to do this? Do I even want to do this? Can I, can we, let go of our previous expectations and explore a completely different plan?

As restrictions come and go, and hopefully eventually go for good, we have the opportunity to re-invent many aspects of our lives. Here at All Souls, I'm particularly excited about the prospect of building a new church culture that is more firmly grounded in the values and practices of liberation. Where we're more focused on relationships and transformation and creating our own ways to do things that don't just mirror the larger, outcome-driven culture.

Some of our Unitarian Universalist theological ancestors promoted, both consciously and unconsciously, the notion of perfectibility as a fixed state that we

could achieve. Or at least that we should strive for. That kind of social Darwinism, which did at times explicitly support eugenics, has been thoroughly discredited intellectually, but it's still in our culture, both as a religious movement and a United States.

So, I think there's great value in constantly reminding ourselves, in as many ways as we can, that adaptability is actually the most helpful and sustainable trait. It's not a fixed position, but the ability to respond to the circumstances that most enables us to survive. And I would argue, to thrive.

So, when life brings us in a circle—as it inevitably will—let's focus on our ability to change. At the very least, it can help us get through it. But maybe we can even figure out how to enjoy the ride.

Amen.

CAM on Pulpit | JANA *Offering*

The taking of an offering—which some Unitarian Universalist congregations call "Sharing in Stewardship"—is a time to lift up the collective responsibility toward the common good. Every week in our church we take up an offering - and going on-line has not stopped that practice.

We take up an offering to ask you to offer something of yourselves to this common endeavor we call church.

We take up this offering because giving is a spiritual practice and does our heart good.

We take up an offering to support not only the staff, the building and the programs of All Souls, but the values we name as critical to Creating and Sustaining what we call Beloved Community.

You may click the link in the chat which will direct you to All Souls on-line giving.

Thank you in advance for your generosity.

CAM on Musicians | Women's 6 *Offertory Anthem* *"River" by Coco Love Alcorn*

The river is a healer, the river is a sage
The river knows no end and the river feels no age

The river is a leader, every single day
It's living in the moment and it always finds a way

Water heal my body, water heal my soul
When I go down, down to the water, by the water I feel whole

The river calls me over, it's calling out my name
In the day and in the night, I hear that river just the same
It's calling me over, calling out my pain
Oh, the river gathers tears just like the river gathers rain

Water heal my body, water heal my soul
When I go down, down to the water, by the water I feel whole

The river is a traveler, always on the go
Oh, the river never worries if it's fast or if it's slow
River take me to where I need to go
And I will just relax and let the river flow

CAM on Musicians | Women's 6 *6 Just as Long as I have Breath*

Just as long as I have breath, I must answer yes to life
Though with pain I made my way, still with hope I meet each day
If they ask what I did well, tell them I said yes to life

Just as long as my heart beats, I must answer yes to truth
In my pain and in my dark, always that elusive spark
If they ask what I did well, tell them I said yes to truth

Just as long as vision lasts, I must answer yes to love
Disappointment pierced me through, still I kept on loving you
If they ask what I did best, tell them I said yes to love.

CAM on Floor | Rob *Benediction*

CAM on Floor | Kathleen *Extinguishing the Chalice*

CAM on Musicians | Women's 6 *Benediction in Music*

"Don't Dream It's Over" by Crowded House, sung by Women's 6

There is freedom within, there is freedom without
Try to catch the deluge in a paper cup
There's a battle ahead, many battles are lost
But you'll never see the end of the road while you're traveling with me

Hey now, hey now, don't dream it's over
Hey now, hey now, when the world comes in
They come, they come, to build a wall between us
We know they won't win

Now I'm towing my car, there's a hole in the roof
My possessions are causing me suspicions but there's no proof
In the paper today, tales of war and of waste
But you turn right over to the TV page

Hey now, hey now, don't dream it's over
Hey now, hey now, when the world comes in
They come, they come, to build a wall between us
We know they won't win
Now I'm walking again to the beat of the drum
And I'm counting the steps to the door of your heart
Only shadows ahead, barely clearing the roof
Get to know the feeling of liberation and relief

Hey now, hey now, don't dream it's over
Hey now, hey now, when the world comes in
They come, they come, to build a wall between us
We know they won't win