

**PRELUDE MUSIC**

Moyo Drum Instrumental Piece (Carol Caouette)

Come Into This Place of Peace - Thaxter Cunio (WBUUC Choir) - No Text Available

**GIVING VOICE TO THE SPIRIT**

**Bright Morning Stars**

Bright morning stars are rising

Bright morning stars are rising

Bright morning stars are rising

Day is breaking in my soul

Oh where are our dear mothers

Oh where are our dear mothers

They are sowing seeds of gladness

Day is breaking in my soul

Oh where are are our dear fathers

Oh where are are our dear fathers

They are in the fields a-plowin'

Day is breaking in my soul

Oh how can I be lonely

My friends are all around me

Their loving arms surround me

Day is breaking in my soul

**Strong is What We Make Each Other - Mary Grigiola**

Strong is what we make each other (2x)

Flowing through me, flowing through you

Birthing life, birthing life.

Pain and vision intertwining (2x)

Flowing through me, flowing through you

Birthing life, birthing life.

Love and justice guide our journey (2x)

Flowing through me, flowing through you

Birthing life, birthing life.

## **WELCOME**

Good morning, and welcome everyone, to White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church. We are a congregation in the free faith tradition, a community of youth, adults and children, dedicated to pluralism in the spiritual search and ethics grounded in action. We're grateful to share this space with you.

Service participants today include Carol Caouette, Rev. Sara Goodman and Nico Van Ostrand, supported by Anna Gehres and Erin Scott.

Today, after the service at 11:15, we hope that you will join us for Social Hour after the service. We'll put the Zoom link and easy instructions in the chat box.

Welcome to our church. Together we grow our souls and serve the world.

*Singing bowl*

## **CALL TO WORSHIP**

Come in.

Come into this space which we make holy by our presence.

Come in with all your vulnerabilities and strengths,

fears and anxieties, loves and hopes,

for here you need not hide, nor pretend,

nor be anything other than who you are

and who you are called to be.

Come into this space where we can heal and be healed, forgive and be forgiven.

Come into this space where the ordinary is sanctified,

the human is celebrated, the compassionate is expected.

Come into this space –

Together we make it a holy space.

*Today, Kathleen Weflen will be lighting our chalice.*

## **LIGHTING THE CHALICE**

## **VIDEO**

When Minnesota schools closed in March, I began a new morning practice—texting a joke or a riddle to my grandnieces and nephews. Every day, until the start of summer vacation, I searched the internet and my memory for silliness to share. Often, someone would send a joke or two in return. Sometimes our group texts would become one long running joke.

Three decades ago, humorist Gina Barreca wrote: “Laughing together is as close as you can get without touching.”

In March this year, she wrote about why we need to laugh in seriously hard times: “Humor insists on the most significant forms of freedom of assembly: the assembly of souls and minds, the community of the anxious and the brave (all of us at different moments), the gathering of storytellers, truth-tellers and eager listeners. . . . Comedy doesn’t lighten the gravity of the situation, but it lightens our hearts. And that is a gift.”

I light the chalice this morning for staying together with laughter.

## **OPENING WORDS**

Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our great covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, and to help one another

## **HYMN**

### **Loosen Loosen**

## **STORY**

This morning’s story is adapted from The Memory Table, from Creating Home.

Seven year-old Steven dragged his feet down the unfamiliar pathway, up the stairs, and down the hall to his new apartment. He was not looking forward to going home. Yesterday a big moving van had brought all his stuff to Apartment 5 and inside would be a mess of half-emptied boxes. This morning he had found his toothbrush, but no toothpaste. Mom said it was in a different box.

Steven felt lonely and sad. Everywhere he had been all week was new, and he was still a little scared of meeting new friends but only being able to see their eyes over their masks. There were scary stories on the news, and his older sister was going to marches almost every weekend. Steven knew his parents were worried about her, and mostly he just missed playing games with her on Saturday nights like they used to.

Lost in thought about how he was feeling, Steven almost walked right past Apartment 5. The new apartment did not greet him the same way as the old one. As Steven crossed the threshold of his new home, he slammed the new door and thought, “Even the door slams differently.”

Standing in the entryway, Steven looked up as he took off his mask and saw his mom coming forward to give him a welcome home hug. Home hugs at the door were his mom’s specialty. Steven felt the familiar warmth and love as his mom hugged him. He smiled at her and forgot his sadness for a moment.

“Come with me,” Steven’s mom said. “I want to show you something!” She took him by the hand and they walked together into the kitchen.

In the kitchen, Steven stopped and stared. Everything was put away and by the window was their very own kitchen table. This rough, pine table had been in his kitchen as long as he could remember. It had two chunky legs on the ends which mom always said made it easier to sweep under. Around the table were four chairs with thick legs that matched the table.

Steven walked to the table and saw the red permanent marker spot he'd made when he was two years old. At the end of the table, a pile of papers was already beginning to form. On the side here was a gouge from when Steven's sister thought she could slice a cucumber snack without a cutting board. And right in the middle was a bowl of mango, cut into perfect cubes like Mom always did when someone was feeling sad.

His mom sat in her usual spot, and Steven sat in his. "I know you've been sad, Steven," his mom said. "You are missing all the old things and exhausted by all the new things. How are you feeling right now?"

Steven thought for a moment, enjoying the sweetness of a mango cube. "I was sad until I saw the table."

"What did the table do to make you feel better?" asked his mom.

"I started thinking about all the things that happen at this table. We have dinner together here every night and that can happen in this apartment, too," Steven said. "And the chalice we light at this table when we share blessings at the end of the day will be the same, even if it's in a new place."

Steven's mom smiled. "What else will continue in this new apartment?"

"I can draw my pictures here and remember all the other times I sat here and created artwork. I can call my friends and play games and make dumplings with you, just like I have before."

"Steven, this table is the place where memories meet new experiences for our family. Our home is the place where we eat together, grow together, and learn together. Even if the building is new, the good things that happen in our home don't change."

"Mom," said Steven, licking the last bit of mango from his fingers, "I'd like to light our chalice right now with the blessing we do at Religious Education on Sunday afternoons. It's perfect for how I feel about this familiar table in our new apartment."

Steven's mom smiled, and retrieved the matchbox. "What is the blessing?"

"Grateful for being, grateful for being here, grateful for being here together."

## MEDITATION

A blessing now, a cheer, for

these two getting married in the midst of the unraveling.

"7 guests, all masked, no music, no reception."

She's stoic, practical, resolved.

"It's not what we imagined," says her girlfriend, laughing. "If our arms were just a little longer, we could do a champagne toast and stay 6 feet apart."

A blessing and a cheer, for those who spin grief into gold, and thereby teach us all how we can go on being human now, even so and even though.

A blessing now, a cheer,

for this one on the grass outside the nursing home,

holding up his hand-made cardboard sign:

"Happy Birthday, Dad! 95 years young!"

"It's not what I imagined," he tells me in a text. "I think he saw me, though."

A blessing, now, a cheer,

for this one packing and unpacking all his stuff for college,

the summer of his dreams, but not what he imagined:

leaving home, heading out, running toward his future

with all his pride and trepidation rolled up with his T shirts.

"We don't even know yet if they'll open. I may not even get to go.

I have to roll with it, I guess. I'm packing just in case."

A blessing now, and cheers, for this non-threshold of a threshold,

and for your drive-by graduation, by the way, weeks ago in June.

We see you, and we're cheering from afar.

A blessing for this pregnancy, this baby that they wanted for so long.

"If we'd known 8 months ago what we all know now, we wouldn't dare imagine it. It feels strange to be so happy, but we just can't not be."

Blessing for safe passage, little child, and for your parents, and blessings for the world, and welcome home.

A blessing now, a cheer,

for this one having surgery.

It's elective but important, and already over-due, scary on its own and terrifying now.

"Not quite what I'd imagined, but I don't really have a choice," she tells us over Zoom.

Courage, friend, and prayers now for swift healing.

A blessing and a prayer

for the one whose husband died in March,

the one whose partner died in April,

the ones whose mother, brother, grandma, close friend, colleague

died and so deserve the marking, the public memory and mourning, the grieving people need.

A blessing now, a prayer,  
for online funerals, memorials in parks, quiet cards, and wailing all alone.  
"We'll wait it out," he says. "It's not what we imagined,  
but we'll just wait until it's safe to say good-bye."

Blessings on you all, beloved ones, and cheers.  
From grief, with grit and love and hope, you are shaping something golden, unimagined.  
To hold up what is holy,  
to celebrate and consecrate what cannot, must not, go noticed or unnamed,  
to find a way, to make a way, where no way was before,  
to imagine what you could not have imagined,  
and make it work, make it lovely, make it real -

a blessing now, and tears.  
We see you there, showing us all how.

For just a few moments, let's hold silence together.

**Amen.**

## **OFFERING INTRO**

In these times your congregation needs you more than ever. With gratitude and gladness, we'll receive the offering to support the work and vision of this community.

## **OFFERTORY Present Moment Wonderful Moment**

## **READINGS**

### **In Praise of Praise by Sean Parker Dennison**

Yes, even now,  
When so much is broken:  
Praise tears that will not  
be held back, witness to  
the immeasurable beauty  
of the smile of a six-year-old  
gunned down by those  
who praise nothing.

Yes, even now,  
when so much is at risk:  
praise the blood the pulses it's  
systole and diastole rhythm,  
dancing to and from the heart,  
even when the sky is smoke

and our masks have become  
an ordinary necessity.

Yes, even now,  
when so much is struggle:  
praise bodies that sweat and tremble,  
muscles tense with  
embodied comprehension  
that we are headed the wrong way,  
and the irresistible urge to change direction,  
a glorious, clumsy, prodigal return.

Yes, especially now,  
when so much is at stake:  
praise something, anything,  
so alive and extravagant  
that it awakens and calls  
you to discard despair,  
abandon apathy and  
praise whatever brings you  
back to life.

**By Anne Frank** from *The Diary of Anne Frank in Day by Day*, ed. Chaim Stern (Beacon Press)

I can feel the suffering of millions  
and yet, if I look up into the heavens,  
I think it will all come right,  
and that this cruelty too will end,  
and that peace and tranquility will return again.  
In the meantime,  
I must uphold my ideals,  
for perhaps the time will come  
when I shall be able to carry them out.

## **MUSIC**

### **Give Me Beauty**

## **REFLECTION**

Hey Y'all, I have to be honest, I don't know how to write the uplifting and supportive sermon that I promised for today. I guess you all didn't know that's what I promised, but I did. Today I'm exhausted, I feel like I'm forever behind, and that there is nothing I can do to change this situation. There is no end in sight to this pandemic, barely any hope for a change in national leadership in a few months. It is hard for me to be optimistic. It feels like we are nearing the end of something, something big, and it's really hard to stay engaged.

And I realize that once again, I am living the point of my sermon. What I want to remind you is the way we are going to make it through this apocalypse is by finding things to praise. Finding something to be grateful for even among the hate, even among the heat, even among the tireless, endless, I'm-so-ready-to-be-done-with-it-already pandemic time.

My colleague, Sean Parker Dennison wrote this poem a couple of years ago, when California was on fire, and a six-year-old girl was killed in her home, but it feels like he's speaking to this moment right now.

"Yes, even now, when so much is broken: praise tears that will not be held back, witness to the immeasurable beauty of the smile of a six-year-old gunned down by those who praise nothing.

"Yes, even now, when so much is at risk: praise the blood the pulses it's systole and diastole rhythm, dancing to and from the heart, even when the sky is smoke and our masks have become an ordinary necessity.

"Yes, even now, when so much is struggle: praise bodies that sweat and tremble, muscles tense with embodied comprehension that we are headed the wrong way, and the irresistible urge to change direction, a glorious, clumsy, prodigal return.

"Yes, especially now, when so much is at stake: praise something, anything, so alive and extravagant that it awakens and calls you to discard despair, abandon apathy and praise whatever brings you back to life."

Even now, when so much – is so much. When so much feels like we're traveling quickly in the wrong direction. When it feels we are heading towards the end.

Apocalypse, which we typically associate with "the end times" isn't what it seems. In Greek, it is actually a term meaning unveiling, or uncovering. For several years I have seen the state of our nation as a great ripping off the scab of what I thought the world is to expose the pus and infection that has yet to heal under the surface. As with any wound, we cannot heal the underlying illness without clearing out the infection. We have to become aware of the festering to be able to heal it before it kills us.

We are unveiling and uncovering so much in this crisis. We knew that many people in this country were living close to the edge financially. When everything shut down, a full third of people in this country were sure they weren't going to be able to pay rent in April. With the one time stimulus check giving \$1200 to each adult who paid taxes, the government hoped to stem bleeding of lost income. Here we are 3 months later, no additional stimulus money coming in, and everything closing down again. A full 32% of the population couldn't pay their housing payment in July.

We unveiled even further the problems in our healthcare system, both that it is extremely racially biased, with the virus killing Latinx and brown people at an alarmingly high rate, and that the cost to individuals who are treated and released is impossibly high, meaning even people who survive it are still going to suffocate under crushing medical debt – and the families of all who have died are going to be on the hook for the lifesaving treatments that didn't work, on top of grieving their loved ones.

We have uncovered more of what we knew, police violence against people of color is rampant and hushed up, and unacceptable. We are in the midst of an uprising – both hindered and fueled by the pandemic. Think how many more people would be on the streets protesting if the fear of the virus wasn't keeping us home?

We have uncovered layers and layers of corruption in our government that we knew were present, but that are now exposed to the light, unfortunately, with little effect.

We have uncovered the depth of disparity in funding education – and the depth of poverty that many children in our schools live with – nearly 22 million children rely on free school lunches to eat. [In Saint Paul, the buses have been bringing school food to families at their bus stops once a week.] Many children were not able to participate in distance learning for lack of a computer, or lack of internet, or both. These are a couple of the factors that are being considered in school districts around the nation as they decide whether or not to hold in-person school this fall.

We have uncovered the implications of losing childcare for families who need both adults in a household to work to be able to pay the bills. It is impossible to work full time outside of the home when the children have no one and nowhere safe to care for them. It is impossible to work full time in the home when there are small or even medium sized children in a household demanding attention.

We are uncovering once again the patriarchy that pays fathers more than mothers, the system that says that mothers are the ones who give up their jobs and their careers to care for the children.

We are uncovering our own complicity in White Supremacy Culture, we have exposed our country's history as destructive and centered on wealth, and we have finally shined the light on the structures of oppression that privilege white people and crush everyone else – all this in our present.

If we are to survive this apocalypse, these uncoverings, we have to find some way to survive our day to day lives in captivity. Although we are not trapped in our homes, we are, many of us confined to them out of self-preservation and the perseveration of those we love. “Loosen, Loosen Baby, You don't have to carry the weight of the world in your muscles and bones.”

What does it feel like to live in the midst of a great unveiling? We always imagine that the end of the world is something that humanity won't survive. So far, we have survived all of the ends of the worlds that have come before- well humanity, but not all humans. A GREAT NUMBER of people have already died of this virus, and it seems a great many more will die before we find a way to survive.

We also need to find a way to survive our survival techniques. Living in close quarters, or worse, all alone through this time is torture for social creatures who need each other's touch to survive – we need a hand and hug and a listening ear. Right now the best we can do is video calls, which are surprisingly good at connecting us to one another, but in no way can replace the touch of a human hand on our shoulders. A masked face cannot begin to convey the full range of human emotion.

What even is time right now anyway? A month feels like a year and a week is gone in a flash. Maybe we can use the wibbly-wobblyness of time to our advantage? Can we take a moment and stretch it out? Can we be present in the moment a few more times a day. Not ignoring what's happening in the world, but appreciating the small things that make the world a place worth living in?

Anne Frank wrote in her diary, “I can feel the suffering of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think it will all come right, and that this cruelty too will end, and that peace and tranquility will return again. In the meantime, I must uphold my ideals, for perhaps the time will come when I shall be able to carry them out.”

Anne Frank didn't survive to be able to carry out her ideals. She died, of illness spread through close quarters to underfed people, at too young an age to live the life that she dreamed – but her words, her diary and her optimism in the face of such atrocity have outlived her.

Her hope beyond hope, her gratitude for the small things in life that kept her and the entire group who were in hiding, it was the small things that kept them alive and safe for a time...

What is it we would live with if it could save our lives? Would we all stay cooped up in a tiny space with too many people? Would we rely on others to bring us supplies? Would we find a way to see the sky at night, when it was safe?

What is it we feel and show gratitude for in our lives? What tiny things can you be grateful for? What huge things are you grateful for?

I am grateful for a job that I can do safely from home, and wonderful coworkers to work with. I am grateful for a family who are healthy and vital. I am grateful for living in a place where there is so much natural beauty easily accessible. I am grateful for my partner, Shawn, who is not working right now so can care for our family.

In an article by Sari Harrar, in the AARP magazine: 'Finding Happiness During Hard Times' Psychologist Maria Sirois, who has written about the emotional resilience of children with cancer and their families, tells us that 'Getting to constructive emotional states begins with acknowledging the bad. "I could binge-watch Netflix for seven hours a day, but that won't sustain me spiritually or emotionally or in my relationships," she says. "Let yourself feel what you're really feeling." Then think about what's important to you right now.

"What's in line with your values? That could be more kindness, spirituality, appreciating life in all its big and small moments, using your own strengths more in the world," Sirois says.'

Gratitude is one way to appreciate life – but sometimes gratitude feels like an academic practice. List three things you're grateful for every day in your journal. Wonderful, check, done. Noticing things you're grateful for in the past is a thing- that works, even! But sometimes I want more than that. Sometimes I have to praise a thing While It's Happening.

I love the word Savor. I can feel the thing rolling around on my tongue, filling up my senses with pleasure. Savoring is a present tense gratitude. Feel the moments of beauty as they are around you.

Admiring the puffy clouds as they speckle a blue sky, while sitting at a stoplight. Feeling the heat of the sun on our skin as we sit in the backyard.

Basking in the affectionate looks given by a loved one – in person or over video chat.

Enjoying tea in your cup, the flavor, the aroma, the warmth.

The flavor of the familiar fruit, cut for you by a loving hand.

Laughing in joy at the giggles of the baby, at the hysterical laughter of the preschooler.

Listening to our favorite music on repeat, letting the notes send chills through our bodies, or letting the beat get us moving.

We have to live through this, and we will, most of us. We will all be better off if we can find a way to live that will bring us solace, and energize us to action. We need to let apathy slide away from us like slippery soap in a sink. (wash your hands!).

Grab the praise, embrace the grateful, hold the ephemeral links to happiness like you hold a balloon string – tie it around your wrist so it doesn't get away from you. If we catch enough of them, they may lift us up.

**HYMN      How Can I Keep from Singing**

## **CLOSING WORDS**

May peace dwell within our hearts, and understanding in our minds

May courage steel our will, and love of truth forever guide us.

## **FAREWELL**

Friends, thank you for joining us.

If you're not receiving our **EMAIL NEWS**, go to our website and sign up! We'll send updates twice a week about groups and gatherings, updates from the Board of Directors, and more. Call or write with questions, or to ask for help, or offer help.

We are sending love from Maple Street and all of our locations. Stay resilient and stay connected, everyone. So be it. See to it. Amen.

**POSTLUDE** **If There is to Be Peace** (Lao-Tzu; music by David Heath, WBUUC Choir)