

Full Text of the Service at White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church
Sunday, September 20, 2020

PRELUDE MUSIC

Come Into This Place of Peace - William Schulz/Thaxter Cunio (WBUUC Choir)

Come into this place of peace, and let its silence heal your spirit
Come into this place of memory, and let its history warm your soul
Come into this place of power, and let its vision change your heart.

River - Roberta Flack (Carol Caouette and Craig Hansen)

There's a river somewhere
That flows through the lives of everyone
It flows through the valleys and the mountains
And the meadows of time
There's a star in the sky
That brightens the lives of everyone
It brightens the mountains and the valleys
And the meadows of time (yes it do)
Yes it do (yes it do)

There are voices from the past
That speak through the lives of everyone
They speak through the valleys and the mountains
And the meadows of time (yes it do)
There's a smile in your eye
That brightens the lives of everyone
I know it brightens the valleys and the mountains
And the meadows of time (yes it do)
Yes it do (yes it do)

There's a short song of life
That sings through the lives of everyone
And it sings through the valleys and the mountains
And the meadows of time (yes it do)
There's a sweet song of love
That sings through the night of everyone
I know it sings through the valleys and the mountains
And the meadows of time (yes it do)
Yes it do (yes it do)

There's a river somewhere
That flows through the lives of everyone
It flows through the valleys and the mountains
And the meadows of time
There's a sweet song of love
That sings through the lives of everyone
I know it sings through the valleys and the mountains
And the meadows of time (yes it do)
Yes it do (yes it do)

WELCOME

Good morning, and welcome everyone, to White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church. I am Jillian Lampert, serving on your Board of Directors.

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.

Service participants today include Rev. Sara Goodman, Rev. Jack Gaede, Nico Van Ostrand, Rev. Victoria Safford and Carol Caouette, supported by Anna Gehres and Erin Scott. Music today is from Carol Caouette and Craig Hansen, Peter Mayer, and the WBUUC Choir directed by Thaxter Cunio

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

This morning we'll be honoring a beloved tradition here, our Water Communion, in several ways. You can participate later on if you have a small bowl of water near you in your space.

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

Singing bowl

Brief Welcome words from VS

Good morning, everyone. We open our service today with grief and gratitude, and dedicate this hour to the memory of Justice Ruth Badger Ginsburg. The best way we know to carry forward her legacy of equity and compassion and justice under the law is to reignite the discouraged cinders of our own citizenship, and be champions, as she was, for equality without exception. Justice, says one writer, is what love looks like in public. With Mother Jones, another great warrior for democracy's promise, we will "mourn the dead and fight like hell for the living." In memorials sometimes, we share the words of Adlai Stevenson, written on the death of his good friend, Eleanor Roosevelt. They speak to this loss also:

... now we must say farewell. We are always saying farewell in this world -- always standing at the edge of some loss, attempting to retrieve some memory, some human meaning, from the silence -- something which was precious and is gone. We pray that there is peace ... and a glimpse of sunset. But today we weep for ourselves. We are lonelier; someone has gone from

our own life who was like the certainty of refuge; and someone has gone from the world who was like a certainty of honor.

Tomorrow evening at 6:30, we'll hold a vigil and gathering to share memories, gratitude, grief and hope. You're invited to bring prayers, poetry and your open heart to a circle of remembrance bearing witness to the life and death of Justice Ginsburg and the future of our country. There's a link in the chat, and you'll find it on Facebook and the website.

CALL TO WORSHIP (by Rev. Rebecca Edmiston Lange, adapted)

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.

Bob Shaw will light the chalice.

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

For water communion today, I am lighting the chalice from my favorite watery place – in a kayak on the St. Croix River. In times of coronavirus, I find that getting out into nature satisfies my soul. As Shakespeare put it, “A touch of nature makes the whole world kin.” I light the chalice today for the one thing we can all do to get through this – get outdoors into nature.

OPENING WORDS (in unison)

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

STORY

For this morning's story I invite you to notice how each word or phrase lands on your heart. How does this story feel as you take it in? What parts of it sparkle at you as I read?

As you notice words or phrases that sparkle at you from this story, hold on to them, whether that means writing them down or simply holding them sacred for a breath.

This morning's story is adapted from Jewish stories about the birthday of the world and the shattering of vessels by Rachel Naomi Remen and Amy Petrie Shaw.

At the beginning of time, before anything else at all existed, Love was all there was, and it filled up everything in the whole universe.

But Love got bored and lonely. There was no one to be in love with. So one day Love decided to make a world.

First it took a deep breath. Then, Love squeezed out darkness. The darkness was all around: thick and shiny and black. It was beautiful, but Love wanted something different. It thought for a minute, and tried to think of the most wonderful beautiful warm thoughts ever. Love thought harder and harder and all of a sudden Love called out "I want light!"

And pop!

All of the warm and wonderful and beautiful thoughts exploded outward in ten different directions and shaped themselves into ten big glowing glass balls. Each ball was filled with pure light and warmth.

And Love said, "This is amazing. I better make something for the light to shine on." So it created another huge ball, this one of dirt and water and plants and animals. Love called this the Earth. The ten balls of light started toward the Earth, but the glass balls were too fragile and they broke open and shattered. And the wholeness of the world, the light of the world was scattered into a thousand thousand fragments of light, and they fell into all events and all people, where they remain deeply hidden until this very day.

So all of us, from the time we are born, have a job, and that job is to help find love and more good and warm and wonderful things. If we do that we are fixing the world.

We are here because we are born with the capacity to find the hidden light in all events and all people, to lift it up and make it visible once again and thereby to restore the innate wholeness of the world.

And this is, of course, a collective task. It involves all people who have ever been born, all people presently alive, all people yet to be born. We are all healers of the world. And that opens a sense of possibility. It's not about healing the world by making a huge difference. It's about healing the world that touches you."

As you listened to this story, I hope you found words and phrases that sparkled out at you. I hope you noticed them, even if you weren't sure why.

As we move into the rest of this service, I hope you will continue the practice of noticing sparklets, holding them sacred and beautiful for a moment.

And as we move into the rest of this day and into tomorrow and the next day and the next, I hope you will extend this practice to other areas of your life -- searching out sparkly words, fragments of light even among grief and fear and other not nice feelings. Those pieces of hidden light may not leap out during the day as the sparkly words did during this story; they may require hard work to find. And this is, of course, a collective task.

HYMN The River - Coco Love Alcorn (led by Carol Caouette)

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

Chorus:

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 all the same
It's calling me over
Calling out my pain
Oh a river gathers tears
Just like a river gathers rain

Chorus

The river is a traveller
Always on the go
A river never worries
If it's fast or if it's slow
River take me
To where I need to go
Oh, and I will just relax and
Let the river flow.

Chorus

MEDITATION

Join me in a prayer today. A prayer for grief, a prayer for fear, a prayer for ourselves and for our country.

Find a comfortable place for your body. Recognize your breath, be it calm or labored, be it shallow or deep. Let your eyes relax or fall shut.

Spirit of Life, and Love, Beloved of many names and beyond naming, we ask you to witness this prayer.

We are angry, we are scared, we are disproportionately shaken by the death of Supreme Court Justice Ginsberg. We are grieving, we are grieving the loss of this amazing woman, who fought cancer and illness for so many years, always surprising us by bouncing back to health, until this time. We lost her this time.

Justice Ginsberg worked tirelessly, and often all night long, to uphold justice through the law. She saw the barriers for women in Law and in other parts of life that many took for granted, she saw these barriers and started to dismantle them brick by brick, bringing along her male colleagues by showing them how sexist laws and norms hurt them as well as the women in their lives. Justice Ginsberg is responsible for many of the changes in law and custom that have made our world more equitable.

We mourn Justice Ginsberg, but I think many of us mourn for what she stood for. Sometimes called The Notorious RBG, she was a symbol of more than she was as a person, no matter how extraordinary that real person was. We mourn the hope that she stood for, the perseverance through struggle. We mourn for the loss of this public figure that many of us had come to see as coming between us and a biased court.

We here are asking you, Spirit of Compassion, to witness to our fear - our fear that is founded in experience - a fear that what gains RBG had given us towards justice could so easily be taken away by someone hastily and spitefully appointed. We fear for folks with uteruses, we fear for folks who JUST got the right to legally marry their spouses, we fear for those who are marginalized in so many ways.

Spirit of Hope, can you remind us that we are not passive receivers of this political landscape, we are given the opportunity to take action: we are given the opportunity to vote. Spirit of Hope, please remind us that we are right to feel - we are right to grieve, and then remind us that we are not at the end, there is still hope to carry with us as we bend the arc of the universe towards justice.

Spirit of Love, Spirit of Life, Spirit of all that is, let us remember that our watery eyes and our watery selves are all connected, all worthy, and all loved. May it be so AMEN.

WATER COMMUNION **INTRODUCTION**

The Water Communion is an old tradition in many Unitarian Universalist congregations, held almost always in the fall. Water flows in our veins every day of our lives. It quenches us, and hydrates us, joins us to the rain and clouds and to each other. It washes us clean and in some communions, that washing is a holy sacrament, the baptism echoed in our own services of dedication.

Water, with its partner, wind, belongs to the wild and sacred dance of weather, an elegant arrangement. It is life. When we desecrate it, even unwittingly, there is death. This morning we hold the people of California, Oregon, Idaho – everyone in the path of wildfire in the west, and we hold the people of Florida and Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and the Carolinas, as Hurricane Sally and its tropical storms move inland from the coast. There are more waters rising, there are more fires burning. And at the same time, we hold those all over the world and in our own country who suffer for lack of water, no potable water at all – for we know that there is plenty.

Normally, I'd say take a deep breath; draw deep the breath of life. But this morning, in solidarity with those in the west who've been advised not to do that, because the air quality so bad, the smoke is thick, and in sympathy with all who have died and all who are sick with Covid 19, which steals away the breath of life, in sympathy and solidarity and with new resolve, I invite you to hold in your heart those who suffer, and take several shallow breaths, urgent breaths, still with gratitude, but with mindfulness and love.

Some of you sent pictures this week, and some brought water here to church, from places that are sacred to you, or from the kitchen faucet that saves your life several times each day. Water is a miracle, and it is a human right. We are all called in this moment, summoned by reverence and conscience, to be Water Protectors now, and land protectors, earth protectors, protectors of each other. In that spirit I invite you to join us in this part of our water communion. As we each say the blessing, say it with us. If you have a bowl of water near you, or a pitcher or a glass, as dip your own hands, with gratitude and wonder, with new resolve, to notice, cherish and protect our living world.

SPEAKERS each say: *Water is a gift. May your love of life be replenished.*

HYMN *There are More Waters Rising* - Saro Lynch-Thomason

There are more waters rising this I know, this I know;
There are more waters rising this I know
There are more waters rising, they will find their way to me
There are more waters rising, this I know, this I know ;
There are more waters rising, this I know.

There are more fires burning this I know, this I know;
There are more fires burning this I know.
There are more fires burning, they will find their way to me;
There are more fires burning, this I know, this I know
There are more fires burning, this I know.

There are more mountains falling, this I know, this I know
There are more mountains falling, this I know.

There are more mountains falling, they will find their way to me;
There are more mountains falling, this I know, this I know.
There are more mountains falling, this I know.

I will wade through the waters, this I know, this I know
I will wade through the waters, this I know.
I will wade through the waters when they find their way to me
I will wade through the waters, this I know, this I know
I will wade through the waters, this I know.

I will walk through the fires, this I know, this I know
I will walk through the fires, this I know.
I will walk through the fires when they find their way to me
I will walk through the fires, this I know, this I know
I will walk through the fires, this I know.

I will rebuild the mountains, this I know, this I know
I will rebuild the mountains, this I know.
I will rebuild the mountains when they find their way to me
I will rebuild the mountains, this I know, this I know
I will rebuild the mountains, this I know.

OFFERING INTRODUCTION

Once a month, our Sunday offering goes out the doors of our church to support justice partners in the community. Kate O'Riley will tell you about this morning's special collection.

OFFERING VIDEO

OFFERTORY MUSIC Rivers of Babylon

READINGS

The first reading is from Marge Piercy, her poem for Rosh Hashanah called "The Birthday of the World"

On the birthday of the world
I begin to contemplate
what I have done and left
undone, but this year
not so much rebuilding

of my perennially damaged
psyche, shoring up eroding

friendships, digging out
stumps of old resentments
that refuse to rot on their own.

No, this year I want to call
myself to task for what
I have done and not done
for peace. How much have
I dared in opposition?

How much have I put
on the line for freedom?
For mine and others?
As these freedoms are pared,
sliced and diced, where

have I spoken out? Who
have I tried to move? In
this holy season, I stand
self-convicted of sloth
in a time when lies choke

the mind and rhetoric
bends reason to slithering
choking pythons. Here
I stand before the gates
opening, the fire dazzling

my eyes, and as I approach
what judges me, I judge
myself. Give me weapons
of minute destruction. Let
my words turn into sparks.

The second reading is also from Marge Piercy, a fragment of her poem, "Coming Up On September"

The New Year, Rosh Hashanah, is a great door
that stand across the evening and Yom
Kippur is the second door. Between them
are song and silence, stone and clay pot
to be filled from within myself.

I will find there both ripeness and rot,
what I have done and undone,
what I must let go with the waning days
and what I must take in. With the last
tomatoes, we harvest the fruit of our lives.

And finally, from Marcia Falk, "Kol Nidrey," a poem for Yom Kippur

All vows-
all promises and pledges –
that we have made to ourselves
and that no longer serve
for the good –
may their grip be loosened
that we be present of mind and heart
to the urgency of the hour.

MUSIC God is a River
In the ever-shifting water of the river of this life
I was swimming, seeking comfort; I was wrestling waves to find
A boulder I could cling to, a stone to hold me fast
Where I might let the fretful water of this river round me pass
And so I found an anchor, a blessed resting place
A trusty rock I called my savior, for there I would be safe
From the river and its dangers, and I proclaimed my rock divine
And I prayed to it protect me and the rock replied
God is a river, not just a stone
God is a wild, raging rapids
And a slow, meandering flow
God is a deep and narrow passage
And a peaceful, sandy shoal
God is the river, swimmer
So let go
Still I clung to my rock tightly with conviction in my arms
Never looking at the stream to keep my mind from thoughts of harm
But the river kept on coming, kept on tugging at my legs
Till at last my fingers faltered, and I was swept away
So I m going with the flow now, these relentless twists and bends
Acclimating to the motion, and a sense of being led
And this river s like my body now, it carries me along
Through the ever-changing scenes and by the rocks that sing this song
God is a river, not just a stone

God is a wild, raging rapids
And a slow, meandering flow
God is a deep and narrow passage
And a peaceful, sandy shoal
God is the river, swimmer
So let go
God is the river, swimmer
So let go

SERMON The Birthday of the World

God is a river, sings our friend, Pete. *God is a river*, not a stone. God is the flow of time and wind and water; seed to shoot to sapling on the bank (think of the creek that flows outside the big window in our church and the great cottonwood that stands there, presiding over us on Sundays) – seed to shoot to sapling on the bank, the girth of its trunk now eight feet around, with bark so thick your entire hand can nestle sideways in the creases. It scatters snowbanks of fluff in the spring, and shade to cool us in summer, and one day it will topple in a storm (hopefully toward the east); it will slump to stump someday and rot, decay (like us), be nourishment for beetles and for soil. Then, seed will come again, dropped by bird, excreted by a squirrel, carried on the current of the water. Our own lives trickle in and out of all this glory for a while, kind of glorious ourselves (we like to think) for just a moment, but God is the river-

not the convictions we cling to like rocks,

not the dogmas, not the creeds,

our positions, politics, opinions,

not our power (that handful of pebbles, handful of sand),

not ego (that block of cement).

God is not what we hold, but what holds us,

not the stone that we clutch, but the river itself and the wind,

not what we grasp in our hands, or our heads -

the certainty that we are right

the certainty of fear -

nor even the sorry, soggy fistfuls of our sorrows and our shame.

God is not the stones that we hold in our hands or our hearts,

but the way that we let go,

the longing to let go,

the yearning and learning to let go.

Which is not to say that we should not hold fast to principles and precious things –

wonder, reverence, thankfulness, joy, delight, compassion,

ethics, justice, mercy -

it is not to say that we should not hold fast to hope, to dreams of better days;

hold fast, as if our lives depended on the holding, to each other, and to love.

It **is** to say: know your place.

Know what's worth protecting and what isn't.

Old wisdom tells us we're a little lower than the angels, maybe quite a bit lower, each of us just one of many, many other animals, each of us just one of many, many millions of living, breathing creatures, including plants and other people, and all of this is fragile and all of it is threatened now, because we've never known our place upon the earth, or at least not for a long, long while. We have totally forgotten.

Recently we've been reminded. These hurricanes and fires - they don't care about the timing of pandemics. The melting glaciers, permafrost defrosting, rising water, drought, and all of the displacement, all of the migration, all the desperation and

the death these unnatural disasters bring – none of this cares at all about the virus and the trouble that’s upon us now. The earth had a pre-existing condition, before Covid, and its advancing sickness will not wait until a better time for us to care. In late March and April there were so many beautiful images, beautiful words, poetry and scientific observation, showing us the blue skies of Wuhan, measuring reduced greenhouse gasses in the air worldwide as people stopped driving, stopped flying, stopped going to work in air-conditioned buildings. The factories shut down. But this is a mirage. It’s a moral mirage, for one thing – you can’t shut factories overnight anywhere in this world without poor people getting poorer, getting sicker, dying of starvation - and the whole world is pressing to open those factories again, to fill the planes again. You can’t see it in the pictures from the satellite, but the short-term moral cost of those blue skies is high. Who gets to say who works, who dies, who breathes clean air, who eats, in the short-term or the long-term? There wasn’t time in March to do an ethical analysis.

It’s a mirage, that patch of sky, in other ways as well. Scientists are clear: that unless there come global, structural interventions right away, pivoting from fossil fuels and plastic and everything we currently consume, these pandemic changes will affect Earth’s climate not at all, even if the changes and restrictions stay in place through 2021. One researcher says, “Lockdown shows that we can change and change fast, but it’s also showed the limits of behavior change. Without underlying structural change, we won’t make it,” he said, referring there to even near-term climate goals. [MNIPL] We’re talking about a structural transformation *of the heart*, a spiritual structural change: first, to discern what it is, in fact, that we as humans worship now, what we cherish, what we bow to, where we place our reverence, and how we understand our place in relation to what’s holy and mysterious and beautiful. That would be a mighty change, and then would follow, then would have to follow, not just recycling, but all the economic, political, practical, life-changing adjustments to mark the end of one way of being (the way we have been moving for centuries and especially since the Industrial Revolution) – the end of one habit of being, which has become a kind of religion for our species, the end of that, and the dawn of an unimaginably new theology (which also happens to be ancient theology). God can’t be what we cling to now, what we purchase and desire and consume. Our holy scripture cannot any longer be the pack of lies we spin to justify what we’ve become. God is a river (that river out there, and all rivers), an ever-unfolding, infinite process that we could yield to and revere.

Marcia Falk is a brilliant poet and mystical, lyrical Jewish thinker and artist. She writes about Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the High Holy Days that Jews all

over the world are observing this week. There's an ancient prayer, the Kol Nidre, in which the people stand in the synagogue and renounce out-loud all the sloppy, unfulfilled intentions of the prior year; Marcia Falk has a variation on that prayer:

All vows-

all promises and pledges –

that we have made to ourselves

and that no longer serve

for the good –

may their grip be loosened

that we be present of mind and heart

to the urgency of the hour.

In another place she says,

At the year's turn [in the fall]

in the days between [the two holidays]

we step away

from what we know

wall and window

roof and road

into the spaces

we cannot yet name

cloud and sky

cloud and wings

Slowly the edges

begin to yield

the hard places

soften

wind and clover

reed and river

the gate to forgiveness

opens.

With hurricanes roaring, wildfires raging, we need to step through that gate.

These are the days of atonement and forgiveness, from Rosh Hashanah which began on Friday to Yom Kippur next Sunday, the days of reckoning and restoration. The Jewish calendar begins on Rosh Hashanah in the fall; it's called the Birthday of the World, marking the creation of the earth itself, that moment told in Nico's story when all the light of the entire cosmos, all the primordial light and love exploded and were shattered, shards scattered here on earth – and our whole work, the whole point of us, is restoration, *tikkun olam*, the mending of the world, finding inside us and among us, the remnants of that love, gathering the fragments of that starlight and shining for each other, for a while.

I was reminded yesterday that in the wonderful documentary about her life and work, called "RBG," Ruth Bader Ginsburg spoke about precisely this. She said that she hoped to be remembered "as someone who did whatever she could, with whatever limited talent she had, to move society along in the direction I would like

it to be for my children and grandchildren.” In Judaism, those who died on the Sabbath are given the title “Tzadik,” most righteous, and for those who die on Rosh Hashanah the honor is yet greater, for it’s believed they have been held back till the very last moment, because they were most needed.

On Rosh Hashanah, say the rabbis, three books are opened at the gates of heaven: the book of life, into which the name of every righteous person is inscribed; the book of death, for the clearly not-so-righteous; and the third book, the largest by far, for everyone whose path is not yet clear, which I assume is most of us. Over the course of these days, ten days, you pray and fast and reconsider and repent, you decide how you mean to be, who you’re called to be. In the ancient text it says,

On Rosh Hashanah will be inscribed and on Yom Kippur will be sealed – how many will pass from the earth in the year ahead, and how many will be born; who will live and who will die; who will die after a long life and who before their time; who by water and who by fire...; who by famine and who by thirst, who by upheaval, and who by plague...; who will rest and who will wander, who will live in harmony and who will be harried, who will enjoy tranquility and who will suffer, who will be impoverished and who will be enriched, who will be degraded and who will be exalted. But repentance, prayer and charity annul the severity of the decree.

Sometimes people take all this to mean that everything is set, your fate has been decided, there’s nothing you can do. Others think it means that if you pray enough and fast enough and do all the formal things on Yom Kippur, God might cut a deal with you, that you can earn your way to heaven by being a strategically observant Jew. But other scholars say this isn’t it at all. They say the text lays out exactly this world is like, full of mysteries and twists and turns that we cannot control. Life isn’t fair always, or predictable or kind or just. We make it fair and kind and just. By repentance, prayer and sacrifice, we annual the severity of the decree. By our care and our work and our will, we write the chapters in the Book of Life. No one lived this out more faithfully than Justice Ginsburg. And our task is not to make an idol of her, nut to carry forward all the light she gathered in her time, to not let that go out. Through the Days of Awe, you decide again how much mercy, how much courage, you’re willing to risk, willing to bring, without knowing ever, for sure,

how it will all turn out. You bring your love and shine your light because you can and because it's right and good.

Marge Piercy says,

*The New Year, Rosh Hashanah, is a great door
that stands across the evening and Yom
Kippur is the second door. Between them
are song and silence, stone and clay pot
to be filled from within myself.
I will find there both ripeness and rot,
what I have done and undone,
what I must let go with the waning days
and what I must take in. With the last
tomatoes, we harvest the fruit of our lives.*

The work is intimate, with family and friends, and it is more than that. In another poem she says,

*On the birthday of the world
I begin to contemplate
what I have done and left
undone, but this year*

not so much rebuilding

*of my perennially damaged
psyche, shoring up eroding
friendships, digging out
stumps of old resentments
that refuse to rot on their own.*

*No, this year I want to call
myself to task for what
I have done and not done
for peace. How much have
I dared in opposition?*

*How much have I put
on the line for freedom?
For mine and others?
As these freedoms are pared,
sliced and diced, where*

*have I spoken out? Who
have I tried to move? In
this holy season, I stand
self-convicted of sloth
in a time when lies choke*

*the mind and rhetoric
bends reason to slithering
choking pythons. Here
I stand before the gates
opening, the fire dazzling*

*my eyes, and as I approach
what judges me, I judge
myself. Give me weapons
of minute destruction. Let
my words turn into sparks.*

The world is on fire. Our country is literally on fire, literally drowning as sea levels rise and the storms intensify. They're running out of names this year for hurricanes. We're running out of words to speak our sorrow and our rage. And we are running out of time. On the birthday of the world we contemplate what we have done and left undone, she says, how much we've dared in opposition. I love her phrase, "Give me weapons of minute destruction," because none of us is large

enough to redress the greed and folly on our own, but each of us can take a step and then another, and each of us can take a stand. Early in-person voting started in our state on Friday, on Rosh Hashanah, the birthday of the world, and to cast your vote for the living, gasping earth itself this year, if for nothing else, would be no small thing - and the choice is crystal clear. To cast your vote for justice and equality this year would be no small thing – and the choice is crystal clear.

I read a piece this week by a woman who learned recently the practice of phenology, the practice of noticing, in nature, right at your window, right at your feet, everything you can, to observe the smallest patch of ground, or a single tree, or stream, or field, the highway median, the island in a parking lot where scruffy grass might grow. Phenology is learning the names of the things, the animals, the birds, the bugs and trees, and their patterns, their habits, and their changes as the climate shifts. It's intimate, *and reverent*, to just observe, and note and care. You might remember that there's a Phenology Board in our church, a whiteboard calendar where for several years people have been writing, or drawing if they're young, things they've seen and heard. Our board is frozen in time, still fixed in March 2019, so it has notes like, "Geese returned this week - walking on the ice on White Bear Lake." Phenology is the practice of knowing your place, being present to your place; its intention is captured in the motto of our Earth Ministry Team (*Notice. Cherish. Protect.*) and it won't change the world or turn back climate change, not all on its own – but it's a step toward wonder, it's a step toward relationship, toward care, toward prayer, I think, toward love and sacrament, and sacrifice. If you truly see a thing, or someone, truly know a thing or a person, you're less likely to hurt it, to hurt them or kill them, or to stand by while damage is done. You address the ground, the sky, the stream, the rabbit in your yard, bow your head, beg forgiveness, and maybe set about the practice of atonement, at-one-ment, restoration.

Writing about the Supreme Court's historic decision on marriage equality, Justice Ginsburg said: "In recent years, people have said, *This is the way I am*. And others looked around, and we discovered it's our next-door neighbor – and we're very fond of them, or it's our child's best friend, or even our child. I think that as more and more people came out and said *this is who I am*, the rest of us recognized that they are one of us."

This living world is holy, every bit of it. It's rare in the cosmos, as far as we know, a spinning ornament made of grass and water with fire at its core. It is our only

home, and the cycles of the life and lives upon it, the water and the wind, and all the people, every one, are the very blood and breath of God.

May you be inscribed in the book of life for a sweet and good new year. Amen.

Sara is going to lead us in a final practice of water communion, inviting you to name and share the waters that you love, the waters that restore your soul.

BLESSINGS OF WATER

INTRODUCTION

What waters have blessed your life, washed your spirit, restored your soul? This morning, together, in real time, we are going to create a collage, a word cloud, a visual that we will be able to see building as we each enter up to three words answering the questions: What waters have blessed your life, washed your spirit, restored your soul. Amy is putting the link into the chat box with a code that you need to enter. Follow the link to the website Menti.com and enter the code **27 52 06 5**. Once you click on the link you will be taken away from your zoom window. Once you've submitted your words, return to your zoom screen to look at the word cloud we are building together. If that doesn't work for you, I invite you to write your words or name of a place into the chat box and we will enter it for you. Erin will now put the information on the screen - the website to go to and the code are listed at the top and our word cloud will form below it.

If you find that you've lost the Zoom screen, try pressing the Alt Key and the Tab Key at the same time, if you're on a PC or the Option Key and the Tab key at the same time if you're on Mac. If you're on a mobile phone or tablet, navigate back to the Zoom app and we should come back up.

<https://www.menti.com> use the code **27 52 06 5**

MUSIC as the "word cloud" is created "Blue Boat Home" - Pete Mayer

*Though below me, I feel no motion
Standing on these mountains and plains
Far away from the rolling ocean
Still my dry land heart can say
I've been sailing all my life now
Never harbor or port have I known
The wide universe is the ocean I travel
And the earth is my blue boat home
Sun, my sail and moon, my rudder
As I ply the starry sea*

*Leaning over the edge in wonder
Casting questions into the deep
Drifting here with my ship's companions
All we kindred pilgrim souls
Making our way by the lights of the heavens
In our beautiful blue boat home
I give thanks to the waves upholding me
Hail the great winds urging me on
Greet the infinite sea before me
Sing the sky my sailor's song
I was born upon the fathoms
Never harbor or port have I known
The wide universe is the ocean I travel
And the earth is my blue boat home*

BLESSING (brief words)

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 to offer help. Please join us at 11:15 for Cyber Social Hour. This is a wonderful opportunity to connect with others in the congregation, to make new connections or renew old ones. We hope to see you there.

A reminder that tomorrow at 6:30 you're invited to join us for a circle of remembrance and hope as we mark the life and legacy of Ruth Bader Ginsburg. The Zoom link is in the chat box, and on Facebook and the website.

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

POSTLUDE Kwa Heri - Traditional Swahili Song

Kwa heri kwa heri (Goodbye, goodbye)
mm pen si kwa heri (loved one, goodbye)
kwa heri kwa heri (goodbye, goodbye)
mm pen si kwa heri (loved one, goodbye)

Tu tata na na tena (we'll meet again)
tu ke sha re wa (God willing)
tu tata na na tena (we'll meet again)
Tu ke sha re wa (God willing)