

**Full Text of the Service at White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church
Sunday, September 27 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.

There is More Love Somewhere (Charlotte's Web, soloist, Hope Safford)

There is more love somewhere, there is more love somewhere;
I'm gonna keep on 'til I find it;
There is more love somewhere.

There is more hope somewhere, there is more hope somewhere;
I'm gonna keep on 'til I find it;
There is more hope somewhere.

There is more peace somewhere, there is more peace somewhere;
I'm gonna keep on 'til I find it;
There is more peace somewhere.

There is more joy somewhere, there is more joy somewhere;
I'm gonna keep on 'til I find it;
There is more joy somewhere.

GIVING VOICE TO THE SPIRIT

When I breathe in, I breathe in peace
When I breathe out, I breathe out love.

Breathe in, breathe out.
Breathe in, breathe out.

Sow in Tears, Reap in Joy: Ruach 5767 (Debbie Friedman)

Ruach is "breath" or "spirit" in a living creature

Those who sow, who sow in tears
Will reap in Joy, will reap in Joy.
Those who sow, who sow in tears
Will reap, will reap in Joy.

Peace is Flowing Like a River

Peace is flowing like a river, flowing out of you and me
Flowing out into the desert, let it flow and make you free.

Love is flowing like a river...

Hope is flowing like a river...

Dreams are flowing like a river...

Peace is flowing like a river...

WELCOME

Good morning, and welcome everyone, to White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church. I am Lisa Borg, 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 Jack Gaede, Amy Peterson Derrick, Sara Goodman, and Carol Caouette, supported by Anna Gehres and Erin Scott. Music today is from Carol Caouette and Craig Hansen, the WBUUC Choir directed by Thaxter Cunio.

Today, 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.

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

Chime

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.

Cheryl Riley will light the chalice.

LIGHTING THE CHALICE **Transcript unavailable**

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

HYMN Comfort Me #1002, STJ

Comfort me, comfort me, comfort me, O my soul.

Comfort me, comfort me, comfort me, O my soul.

Sing with me, sing with me, sing with me, O my soul...

Speak for me, speak for me, speak for me, O my soul...

Dance with me, dance with me, dance with me, O my soul...

STORY

As Unitarian Universalists, we draw wisdom from many different sources including from the stories of our faith ancestors. Today, I share with you a story about a Universalist preacher named John Murray.

John was born and raised in England and Ireland, and grew up to be a great public speaker and preacher. John was always curious about new ideas and was eager to learn new things. One of the new ideas that John and his wife, Eliza, learned of, was an idea called “universalism.” This was the idea that ALL people were beloved of God, no matter what. The more they learned of universalism, the more John went out to preach this gospel of love. But things quickly changed for John when he was driven away from his church by people who did not agree with his message; he eventually became indebted and was arrested, and then unexpectedly lost his infant son and wife to illness.

John was so sad; he was angry; he was devastated. He did not know what to do with his broken heart—he was so sad that he wasn't even sure what he believed anymore, and so he decided he would never preach again.

And while John's closest friends begged him to continue preaching, John, instead, decided that what he wanted was the life of solitude that he heard he could find across the ocean in the colonies. And so, he boarded a ship called the Hand-in-Hand, bound for New York.

Yet again, John faced the unexpected when the ship landed far from its intended destination of New York and became stranded on a sand bar outside of a small town called Good Luck, New Jersey. (Needless to say, John did not at all feel that he had landed upon Good Luck!) The crew knew that they would be stranded until the wind changed again, for ships in that time depended on the wind to sail. And so, not knowing how long they would be stranded, John was charged to go ashore to look for food and supplies for him and the crew.

Soon John came across a farm, not far from shore, and there, he was greeted by a farmer named Thomas Potter. Thomas welcomed John with open arms, saying that he had been waiting for him; he provided John with enough food for everyone on the hand-in-hand. As Thomas Potter learned more about John Murray and the journey that led him to the shores outside of Good Luck, the more Thomas was convinced that John really was just the person he had been waiting for.

You see, Thomas had himself heard the message of Universalism many years before, and was so convinced that the world needed to hear the loving message that he built a small chapel on his own farm with the hopes that one day, a Universalist preacher might come to fill it. But for 10 long years, the pulpit remained empty, even while Thomas Potter had sought preachers.

So, as you can imagine, while John Murray felt stranded by the wind, Thomas Potter believed that the wind had brought him a wonderful gift: the preacher he had been looking for! And so, he begged John Murray to stay.

But John Murray remained unsure--he had vowed to never preach again and was eager to begin his new life of solitude in New York. Though he was a gifted preacher, he wasn't really looking for a new pulpit or a new congregation, or even a new friend. After much convincing, Thomas Potter was able to get the reluctant John Murray to make a deal: if the wind had not changed by the following Sunday, John Murray agreed that he would preach.

And what do you think happened?

The wind did not change and on that Sunday, about 250 years ago, on September 30, 1770, that John Murray preached his first sermon in America in the small chapel that Thomas Potter built. The wind changed soon after, and John Murray boarded the ship and sailed on to New York. John came back not long after to visit his new, unexpected friend, and to preach again in Thomas Potter's chapel. In fact, John Murray began preaching all over the East Coast and established the First Universalist church in Gloucester, Massachusetts, bringing his message of Love wherever he went.

MEDITATION

Please join me in a spirit of prayer and meditation. Take a moment to sink into your seat, notice the depth or shallowness of your breath, relax your shoulders away from your ears, and be calm and open in the present moment.

Thinking of the whole virtual community gathered this morning, we hold out our open palms and feel the weight of our congregation. We feel the heaviness of the burdens we carry, and we also feel the strength in our spirits--ready and able to complete the tasks ahead of us.

We have so many ancestors--people who championed courage, justice, and universal messages of love. We also are descended from people with less-than-stellar records of justice

and equity--people who stole and harmed, people who failed to honor treaties and who undervalued human life and dignity. Our ancestry is complex, and it includes stardust. We come from the same stuff that makes up the stars, and that stardust lived in John Murray, Thomas Potter, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, John Lewis, and the former co-moderator of the UUA Elondria Williams, who passed away this week. May they rest in peace and in power. May we continue to learn from their legacies, honor their histories and take up the mantles they left behind.

Let's take a moment to honor the ancestors who came before us who continue to shape our lives--those who live on in our memories. Say their names out loud in honor and reverence...

We also honor those living among us in this present moment--the living ancestors and the living descendants--the people that comprise our human family in all of its messy complexity. We know that the people around us are experiencing the full gamut of human emotion--joy and sorrow, loss, success, grief, pleasure, happiness, sickness, health, fear, and hope. In this very moment, we breathe together and meditate on the people in our lives who need support and comfort, we think and bless the people in our lives who have been giving support and love. We take another breath, and we ask for a blessing for those folks on our hearts and in our minds--speaking their names out loud...

To all these prayers spoken and unspoken, we give our intention. With our palms still open before us, we feel the weight of this community. And we feel that our communal burden has been slightly lifted, our connections to each other helping to hold us up, strengthening our resolve. So be it and amen.

OFFERING

In these times, your financial support for our congregation matters more than ever. Please be generous!

OFFERTORY Interlude by Craig Hansen

READINGS

Our first readings is Watching My Friend Pretend Her Heart Isn't Breaking By Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

On Earth, just a teaspoon of neutron star
would weigh six billion tons. Six billion tons
equals the collective weight of every animal
on earth. Including the insects. Times three.
Six billion tons sounds impossible
until I consider how it is to swallow grief—
just a teaspoon and one might as well have consumed
a neutron star. How dense it is,
how it carries inside it the memory of collapse.

How difficult it is to move then.
How impossible to believe that anything
could lift that weight.
There are many reasons to treat each other
with great tenderness. One is
the sheer miracle that we are here together
on a planet surrounded by dying stars.
One is that we cannot see what
anyone else has swallowed.

Our second Reading is Prayer for the Morning By Audette Fulbright

Did you rise this morning,
broken and hung over
with weariness and pain
and rage tattered from waving too long in a brutal wind?
Get up, child.
Pull your bones upright
gather your skin and muscle into a patch of sun.
Draw breath deep into your lungs;
you will need it
for another day calls to you.
I know you ache.
I know you wish the work were done
and you
with everyone you have ever loved
were on a distant shore
safe, and unafraid.
But remember this,
tired as you are:
you are not alone.
Here
and here
and here also
there are others weeping
and rising
and gathering their courage.
You belong to them
and they to you
and together,
we will break through
and bend the arc of justice
all the way down

into our lives.

MUSIC Draw the Circle Wide (Mark Miller) - WBUUC Choir; Director/arrangement, Thaxter Cunio; Production, Steve Goranson

Draw the circle, draw the circle wide
Draw the circle, draw the circle wide
No one stands alone, we'll stand side by side
Draw the circle, draw the circle wide.

Draw the circle wide, draw it wider still
Let this be our song; no one stands alone.
Standing side by side, draw the circle wide.
Draw the circle, draw the circle wide.

SERMON Our Very Presence

Some of my earliest memories are of presence, of place. My very first memory is of the inside of the YWCA swimming pool – all classic brickwork and echoes.

Some of my earliest memories are of the sounds of a place that was mine: listening to new age music from my fort under the massage table in my dad's office, the thhwang the wires holding it together made when I plucked them like guitar strings. And in retrospect, not the most relaxing sound while my dad gave massages to clients.

A memory of a place that was mine: Listening to the waves crash at the beach for hours, running my fingers through the warm sand; and then suddenly the waves were TOO LOUD and it wouldn't feel like mine anymore. Hearing my mom cry in another room in our house, going to her, hugging her as she wept.

I listened a lot. When I was a kid, growing up an only child with divorced parents, I spent a lot of time with adults and a lot of time alone. I got very familiar with doing my own thing while the adults around me were talking or working. Folks now call it parallel play. Two people in the same space, doing their own thing, but together. I got really good at it, and still enjoy it to this day.

I would sit, lonely, in my dorm room sometimes – until my friend down the hall would invite me to her room to do our homework together. She would be painting and I would be reading. We just enjoyed being in each other's presence.

One of the things I learned over my early life, is that presence – the physical or emotional presence of someone I trust makes all the difference to my wellbeing. If I could hear the sound of my mom's voice on the phone, I'd be OK. If I could sit and watch a movie with my friends, or write our sermons in a coffee shop with a classmate, or watch our children play from the same bench at the playground. I would be OK.

Let me just say, this pandemic is so lonely. I am so fortunate to have my best friend, my co-parent: my husband by my side through this time. We support and care for each other every day. But I am acutely aware of the isolation and loss so many people are experiencing. The

presence of others is so important to our wellbeing. Loving physical touch is vital to human wellbeing. And too many of us are not able to get those needs met.

We need to be reminded of our interconnectedness, our inter-dependence within the web of existence. Many of us are finding this sense of connectedness through the experience of the outdoors. We are more than ever soaking up every last bit of sun, going into nature, watching the leaves change color.

And as we see the leaves change, as we anticipate coming winter, some of us – well some of you – are making plans.

I have been tucking my head in the sand and pretending that it's still summer. I could until a couple days ago, with the weather so nice. But not much longer.

Since we can't go the places we normally go to be together, since we cannot spend as much time outdoors as the winter cold descends upon us, we need to make contingency plans.

Rachel Miller is Deputy Editor of VICE Life and the author of *The Art of Showing Up: How to Be There for Yourself and Your People*. In her recent Article: *If You're Already Dreading Winter, Here Are Some Small Ways to Prepare Now*, she asks "What can you do to ensure that you stay social?":

"I think a lot of people are, reasonably, worried about feeling extra lonely and isolated this winter. ... One suggestion: if you have a few not-super-close friends who you really click with, and who you could invest a little more time and attention in, that might be a good move right now. (Going this route can be easier than trying to make a bunch of new friends, or attempting to stay in touch with everyone you've ever met.)

"Also, if the standing video hangouts you were all about last spring have fallen by the wayside, get them back on the calendar ASAP so they become part of everyone's routine. This might also be a good time to find a pen pal, connect with your neighbors, or get in the habit of calling people on the phone."

Now might be the time to remember that church is still happening, that we still meet every week, more than once every week. Not in person, but on Zoom, here, like this, and face to face too. I might be the only one in the sanctuary today, but I am not the only one in this church.

Zoom may not feel the same as in person. WE KNOW IT'S NOT. We know. But it IS better than not seeing each other at all.

Now may be the time to call up your church friends that you haven't seen online and check in, send a card, send an email (although email is rough right now).

We are a community, a community of care and compassion. We are connected, interconnected, and sometimes all we need to remember that is presence. The presence of another's face on a screen. The presence of another's voice on the phone line. The presence of letters arriving in mailboxes. We can and must be present to each other, this year more than ever before.

We are, some of us, struggling. Some of us struggling with loneliness, some of us struggling with working while parenting and educating our children, some of us are struggling in relationships that aren't built to be in such close quarters for so long. Some of us are struggling with job loss, some with too much to handle. Some of us, many of us, are struggling with the election, and what the outcome could mean for our country.

Some of us are struggling with the death of loved ones, the ending of relationships. With grief that is so heavy on our hearts, like swallowing the weight of a teaspoon of neutron star on earth,

“How dense it is,
how it carries inside it the memory of collapse.
How difficult it is to move then.
How impossible to believe that anything
could lift that weight.” Says the poet.
“There are many reasons to treat each other
with great tenderness. One is
the sheer miracle that we are here together
on a planet surrounded by dying stars.
One is that we cannot see what
anyone else has swallowed.”

In times of distress and struggle, it is easy to get caught up in the stress and strain of our lives. It is easy to drive too fast, or react too angrily when met with a new struggle. It is easy to break down crying in the middle of the grocery store. It is easy to think that we are alone. We need to treat each other with great tenderness. We don't know what anyone else has swallowed.

We are a people who need one another's presence. We are a people who need to be held when grief overwhelms us. We are a people who need to sit by someone's bedside as they're dying, who need to gather in grief and joy, we are a people who need to be together. And when we can't be physically together, we need to find other ways.

In my training for pastoral care, I have again and again learned the lesson that presence makes all the difference. Presence in this case means deep listening, deep caring, deeply seeing the other person. Treating them as whole and holy. This presence is just as important on the phone or over zoom as it is being in person. Bringing someone a book of poetry they love, or singing some of their favorite songs with them can be some of the more meaningful experiences with someone who is suffering.

I know that many of you are from the Midwest where the culture is one of suck it up and do the thing yourself. But now more than ever we have to examine that belief. Now more than ever we need to be able to reach out to someone and ask for help. If you need assistance with food, or rent, if you need someone to talk to, give us a call, send us an email. We're not scary or judgmental. We want to help. There are even members of the congregation who are trained to listen to you without judgment. We call them Pastoral Care Companions.

Our Pastoral Care Companions are trained and skilled in deep listening, in hearing from you, about you and leaving it at that. Our Pastoral Care Companions are eager to hear about your heartache, or how wonderful it is to have a new baby or grandbaby, and yet how hard it is to be a parent or grandparent in the pandemic. Our Pastoral Care Companions are trained to not talk about what you tell them with anyone else unless you ask them to tell one of the ministers. Our Pastoral team also coordinates writing cards to folks who are having a hard time, or experiencing a joy. We are also able to mobilize folks in the congregation to help provide meals for those who are in the middle of a short term crisis.

We are a community of love, a community of care, a group of people who are deeply interconnected and take care of each other.

So here I am, asking you for help. I am modeling the behavior. I need your help. Yes you. I need you to understand that your needs are important too. I need you to offer to help others as much as you can, and make the commitment to take your needs a priority in your life. I need you to drop me an email, or give me a call if you need to talk to someone.

Or Victoria or Jack. Or your trusted friends, or chosen family, or family of origin if they are close to you. Just remember, you are not alone.

Hear this prayer for the morning, this morning and every morning, by Audette Fulbright:

“Did you rise this morning,
broken and hung over
with weariness and pain
and rage tattered from waving too long in a brutal wind?

Get up, child.

Pull your bones upright
gather your skin and muscle into a patch of sun.

Draw breath deep into your lungs;

you will need it

for another day calls to you.

I know you ache.

I know you wish the work were done

and you

with everyone you have ever loved

were on a distant shore

safe, and unafraid.

But remember this,

tired as you are:

you are not alone.

Here

and here

and here also

there are others weeping

and rising

and gathering their courage.

You belong to them

and they to you

and together,

we will break through

and bend the arc of justice

all the way down

into our lives.”

May it be so. Join me in a time of silence before we join Carol in singing our hymn: Strong is What We Make Each Other by Mary Grigolia

HYMN Strong is What We Make Each Other (Mary Grigolia)

Strong is what we make each other, strong is what we make each other
Flowing through me, flowing through you
breathing life, breathing life.

Pain and vision intertwining, pain and vision intertwining
Flowing through me, flowing through you
breathing life, breathing life.

Love and justice guide our journey, love and justice guide our journey
Flowing through me, flowing through you
breathing life, breathing life.

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. 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

If There Is To Be Peace (Lao Tzu; David Heath) WBUUC Choir; Flutes, Polly Meyerding-Dedrick and Russell Dedrick

If there is to be peace in the world, there must be peace in the nation;
If there is to be peace in the nation, there must be peace in the cities;
If there is to be peace in the cities, there must be peace between neighbors;
If there is to be peace between neighbors, there must be peace in the home.
If there is to be peace in our home, there must be peace in the heart.