

## Full Text of the Service at WBUUC

Sunday September 6 2020

---

### PRELUDE MUSIC

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

### GIVING VOICE TO THE SPIRIT

#### Comfort Me #1002

Comfort me, comfort me, comfort me, oh, my soul  
Comfort me, comfort me, comfort me, oh, my soul

Sing with me, sing with me, sing with me, oh, my soul  
Sing with me, sing with me, sing with me, oh, my soul

Speak for me, speak for me, speak for me, oh, my soul  
Speak for me, speak for me, speak for me, oh, my soul

Dance with me, dance with me, dance with me, oh, my soul  
Dance with me, dance with me, dance with me, oh, my soul

Comfort me, comfort me, comfort me, oh, my soul  
Comfort me, comfort me, comfort me, oh, my soul

#### **I Am Enough, I Am Not Enough** (Rev Kelli Clement, former WBUUC Ministerial Intern)

I am enough, I am not enough  
I am enough, I am not enough  
I give help when I can, there is help for me  
I am enough, I am not enough.

You are enough, you are not enough  
You are enough, you are not enough  
Oh friend, here is my hand, I will help you through  
You are enough, you are not enough.

We are enough, we are not enough  
We are enough, we are not enough  
There is strength in our bond, we have room to grow  
We are enough, we are not enough.

## **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. I am Rev. Jack Gaede, Assistant Minister. We're grateful to share this space with you.

This morning, we are pleased to welcome some of the members and friends of First Universalist Church, our sibling congregation in Minneapolis. We're glad you're here.

Service participants today include Amy Peterson Derrick, Carol Caouette and Victoria Safford, supported by Anna Gehres. Music today is from Carol Caouette and Craig Hansen, the WBUUC Choir directed by Thaxter Cunio, and Russell and Polly Dedrick.

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.

*Singing bowl*

## **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.

Helen Duritsa will light the chalice.

## **LIGHTING THE CHALICE**

The theme for September is Presence: the practice of knowing my place. This is a large theme.

What is knowing my place? It is my presence with you right now. My presence is with you right now, you can see me. I cannot see you but I know you are present, you have presence.

There exists on the back of an envelope in my burlled maple secretary a list of 5 practices in Buddhist philosophy. When I wrote them down, I neglected to attribute them to a teacher or text, yet I read them and practice them. One tenet is, "Find a place of rest in the middle of things."

The vagueness of the word things expands and overfills. The phrase doesn't tell me to rest in the middle of an event or an emotion. It simply says things. How broad the term a thing is.

I feel my way along this, at times, weary path of adjusting, for rest in the middle of things. My on days. My off days. A day of accomplishment or of nought. I cultivate a place of rest in the middle of things, a moment of awareness of the moment.

Let us light our chalices. Let us cultivate this moment of our presence.

### **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 I Know I Can #1015**

Though days be dark with storms  
and burdens weigh my heart,  
though troubles wait at every turn  
I know (*I know*), I can (*I can*) go on.

When sorrow heals my soul  
and burdens make me strong,  
though troubles wait at every turn  
I know (*I know*), I can (*I can*) go on.

My family is in my heart  
My friends are in my song  
though troubles wait at every turn  
I know (*I know*), I can (*I can*) go on.

And though the journey is long,  
The destination is near,  
though troubles wait at every turn  
I know (*I know*), I can (*I can*) go on.

So family, take my hand,  
And friends, sing my song  
though troubles wait at every turn  
I know (*I know*), I can (*I can*) go on.

### **STORY**

Words to live by: A tale from Iran  
by Sarah Conover and Freda Cane (Adapted)

Long, long ago, there lived a ruler of Nishabur who longed to be just, wise, and generous; he was, however, the opposite. His temperament was as changeable as the wind: when things went the way he desired, he gloated and puffed about. When something unpleasant came to pass, he stomped and wailed in a fit. He played favorites in his court and held grudges for years. In short, the ruler was very unhappy.

But the ruler had one important virtue: he knew he needed to change. He recognized that his misery was his own doing. So one day, he sat down and pledged to think seriously about his problem until it was solved.

After a little thought, it occurred to the ruler that his temper was likely the result of poor nerves, or perhaps, a weak heart. He summoned the best doctor in the land, hoping for medicine to cure his anger. The doctor felt his pulse, listened to his heart, examined his eyes, and tapped his knees to check the nerves.

At last, the doctor faced the ruler of Nishabur and spoke solemnly, "I'm afraid there is nothing physically wrong with you." This was good news of course, but also bad news, for that meant the ruler's misery was not due to poor health.

The ruler bellowed, "you must have missed something! Of course, there is something wrong with me!" He rose and stomped in a circle. "I think the problem might be that you are no good at medicine!"

The doctor waited for the ruler's temper to subside. Then he gently said, "No, the problem is nothing that an herb can cure; this is a matter of the heart. Hard as it may be, you are going to have to learn to approach this problem with patience and humility.."

The ruler didn't care much for these words; in fact, they stung with the truth. He listened. "What you must now do," continue the doctor, "is find the right spiritual medicine. Read every book of wisdom ever written. Listen to the advice of the greatest thinkers. Find a motto to live by that will give you patience and contentment so you do not become lost in joy or sorrow." The ruler of Nishabur took this advice to heart. "You're right," he finally admitted. "I should have done this long ago." The ruler thought for a while: "Let us gather the greatest minds in all the kingdom. We shall send letters out and call it the great Conference of Calming Words."

And so, a week later the great conference began. Philosophers, poets, artists, Scholars, and Imams crowded the room. One by one, each stood before the ruler, offering advice. Thick books were consulted, songs sung, poetry recited, sermons offered. It was a dizzying array. But the ruler was not yet satisfied, complaining, "no, that's too long," or "that phrase is too complicated," or that motto is too simple." Nothing seemed to suit the ruler and he began to lash out in frustration, just as he always had in the past.

Just then, a messenger arrived at the court. Although dressed in Homespun clothes, there was something regal and wise about the way he carried himself. He stood to the side while the ruler read the message he had delivered. Meanwhile, the crowd began to grow unruly, pointing out the shortcomings of this or that advice. By the time the ruler had written a reply to the note, the messenger, a good listener, understood exactly why the assembly had been called.

As the ruler handed him the response, the messenger offered, "I believe I have a simple motto, sir, only four words long which will meet your needs. With your permission, may I speak?"

At first, the ruler hesitated. "Well," he finally said, "I don't see why not. Perhaps you know something the others don't. So the ruler hushed the assembly, requesting that they let the messenger address them with his four words of advice. The restless crowd protested.

"He says he has a motto four words long which charts a course of wisdom in any situation? I don't believe it for a second." A noisy chorus joined in agreement.

"Wait," said the messenger. "What you say is true--I am just a messenger. But you have found a motto for our ruler? If I offer one, then, what harm can it do?"

"Go on," said the ruler, "let us hear what you have to say."

"Our ruler has asked," the messenger began, "for a short motto to guide his actions and every situation. It must protect him from pride when he is lucky and successful. Just as importantly, it must soften the blows of sorrow and disappointment." The messenger looked at the sea of stubborn faces in the crowd, then he spoke then he faced the ruler of Nishubar. "I know four words which can achieve this," he paused and then spoke: "*this too shall pass.*"

Chaos broke out in the hall. "That is a foolish saying! It will make our ruler weak!" Said one.

"How can that be a guide," said another, "It doesn't show right from wrong." Said another.

"It is an old fashioned way to look at things," shouted a third.

But throughout these disagreements, the Ruler of Nishabur was occupied in thought, gazing at the messenger. Eventually, the ruler spoke, "Actually, in my view, these four words might be the best I've heard today. They will help me to reflect in every situation and they question a quick temper. They are soothing as well as simple. They will help me remember all things are changeable. They remind me to accept the good with the bad, happiness with sorrow,," He said.

The members of the conference were not pleased with the ruler's choice of the simple motto. Some reacted angrily, others sulked. The ruler announced, "until better words can be found these four words will be my motto."

He dismissed the assembly and sent the messenger away with the reward of a large Pearl. Soon after, the ruler of Nishabur had the words, *This Too Shall Pass*, inscribed on a plane, gold band.

## **MEDITATION**

Friends, take a deep breath.

On the threshold of the morning, the threshold of the day,  
draw deep the breath of life, the spirit of life,  
and be at home in your body,

be at home in your space,  
be at home in this world.

We are together, apart, holding space in the week, space in this hour,  
for each other. Close your eyes, or keep them open,  
and call to mind the faces of those you love,  
the ones who brighten your days,  
the ones you worry about,  
the ones you are so grateful for.  
Breathe deep, and see if you can call to mind  
the faces of those you've been with here  
on Sunday mornings,  
your community, your congregation,  
still here for you, and part of you.

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

- - -

I invite you to open your hands.  
Into the silence now, and out of it, whisper quietly or speak out loud  
the names of those you're holding in your heart,  
and in your open hands, catch the names that others are speaking,  
and cherish them,  
bless them,  
for a moment.

---

Spirit of life, may we be filled with loving kindness.  
As summer opens into fall,  
filled with beauty and uncertainty,  
may we be gentle with ourselves and with each other.

For those who are lonely or frightened – loving kindness.  
For those who are anxious or depressed – loving kindness.  
For those who are short-tempered, exhausted – love and kindness, and a prayer for peace.

In the midst of these turbulent days,  
may we be peaceful and at ease.  
May we be whole.

Amen

We're going to sing together, a prayer response, #1031 in the green hymnal.

## **MUSIC MEDITATION**

### **Filled with Lovingkindness #1031**

May I be filled with lovingkindness. May I be well.

May I be filled with lovingkindness. May I be well.

May I be peaceful and at ease. May I be whole.

May you be filled with lovingkindness. May you be well.

May you be filled with lovingkindness. May you be well.

May you be peaceful and at ease. May you be whole.

May we be filled with lovingkindness. May we be well.

May we be filled with lovingkindness. May we be well.

May we be peaceful and at ease. May we be whole.

## **OFFERING**

Your gifts are needed more than ever. Today's offering will go toward supporting the missions and vision of our church community. Please be generous.

**OFFERTORY**    **I Am a River** (performed by Carol Caouette)

## **READINGS**

**The first reading is from a poem from Danez Smith called "not an elegy"**

do you expect  
me to dance  
when every day someone  
who looks like everyone

i love is in a gun fight  
armed with skin?

look closely  
& you'll find a funeral

frothing in the corners  
of my mouth, my mouth

hungry for prayer  
to make it all a lie.

reader, what does it  
feel like to be safe? white?  
how does it feel  
to dance when you're not

dancing away the ghost?  
how does joy taste

when it's not followed  
by *will come in the morning?*

reader, it's morning again  
& somewhere, a mother

is pulling her hands  
across her seed's cold shoulders

kissing what's left  
of his face. where

is her joy? what's she to do with a child

who'll spoil soon?  
& what of the child?

what was their last dream?  
who sang to them

while the world closed  
into dust?

what cure marker did we just kill?  
what legend did we deny

their legend? i have no more room for grief.

it's everywhere now.  
listen to my laugh

& if you pay attention  
you'll hear a wake.



**The second reading is from Rosemary Freeney Harding:**

There is no scarcity. There is no shortage. No lack of love,  
of compassion, of joy in the world. There is enough.

There is more than enough.

Only fear and greed make us think otherwise.

No one need starve. There is enough land and enough food.

No one need die of thirst. There is enough water. No one  
need live without mercy. There is no end to grace. And we  
are all instruments of grace. The more we give it, the more  
we share it, the more we use it, the more God makes. There  
is no scarcity of love. There is plenty. And always more.

**The final reading is called "little prayer," a poem from Danez Smith:**

little prayer

let ruin end here

let him find honey  
where there was once a slaughter

let him enter the lion's cage  
& find a field of lilacs

let this be the healing  
& if not let it be

**MUSIC**      Peaceable Kingdom by Patti Smith

Yesterday I saw you standing there with your hand against the pane  
Looking out the window at the rain  
And I wanted to tell you that your tears were not in vain  
But I guess we all knew we'd never be the same, never be the same

Why must we hide all these feelings inside?  
Lions and lambs shall abide

Maybe one day we'll be strong enough to build it back again  
Build the peaceable kingdom back again, build it back again

Why must we hide all these feelings inside?  
Lions and lambs shall abide

## SERMON

### The Abundance of Now

Thanks again this week to Carol and Craig for recording such beautiful music in the middle of a garage. And thanks to Patti Smith for writing such a beautiful song, a song which was inspired by and dedicated to Rachel Corrie, a young woman from Washington state, who died in the Gaza strip when she put her body on the line to protect someone's home. She was run over by a bulldozer, and the driver claimed he didn't see her. So Patti sings, "Maybe one day we'll be strong enough to build it back again, build the peaceable kingdom."

How can we possibly build it back again? The peaceable kingdom? I don't have the answer to that question, and I don't think Patti did either. But I do have another question that resonates to the same frequency. How can I--just one person--send out a blessing of lovingkindness to the world? Is it effective? Does it matter? Am I enough? If we ask that question a different way, we'll get a different answer. Does this world need your blessing? Yes, it most certainly does. Okay. So then, why wouldn't you give it?

At times, it will feel inadequate, but we don't always know the impact of our words and actions. Sometimes I wonder if this whole world is being knit together string by string with every little prayer and blessing you and I and everyone else can muster. Everything from the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi to the simple but vital prayer of "Help! I can't do this alone." Your blessing for the world might feel like it's not enough, but we don't need to accept a scarcity mentality. Rosemary Freeney Harding teaches us that there is no scarcity, no shortage of love. There is enough. This isn't science or statistics. This is radical hope. This is the kind of passionate delusion that allows us to plant seeds for trees whose fruit we will never eat. This is no time for despair; this is the abundance of now.

The Peaceable Kingdom is not going to be built on perfect institutions or on flawless foundations. It will not get built with perfect hands, nor will it wait for the perfect moment. If the Peaceable Kingdom is to be built at all, it will be built in this world, in this moment. In this world that gets constantly buffeted by storms and wars, revolts and revolutions. In this moment that is filled with upheavals, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, pandemics,

and disease. The Peaceable Kingdom can only be built amidst and among these very things, and let it begin in this very moment.

Last month's theme was Joy--the practice of living with despair. Next month's theme is Reformation--the practice of acting up. But how do we go from joy to reform? What will serve as the bridge transporting us between these two disparate-seeming shores? The answer is Presence. Standing here on this bridge, we span the whole river with one foot on each shore. The river rushes past below us, constantly flowing. Every moment brings new water, new stories, new moments.

Our theme this month is presence--the practice of knowing your place, and this theme grounds us in the presence of now. We have fought for joy and we are moving toward reform, but for now we are present. We are present to our place--rooted in the earth, a part of the natural world, and we are also present to our present--with our feet planted firmly in the moment of now. Not a now that is disconnected from our surroundings, nor a now that ignores our pain or the pain of our neighbors. Not a now that only talks wistfully about the before times or pines for a "return to normalcy." We are focused on staying rooted in the present while still attending to our histories since we don't want to repeat old mistakes. We are staying rooted in the present while also keeping our eyes on the prize--hopeful and forward-looking.

And the story that Amy just shared with us points to a helpful mantra for staying in the present: this too shall pass. And of course, this mantra needs to be contextualized and complicated. This too shall pass, meaning this pandemic will pass, as will these hurricanes. But so will your health at some point, and mine. We are mortal beings--part of the natural world, not above it. Viruses are also part of this natural world. Krista Tippett recently interviewed British environmentalist Michael McCarthy who said, "Though we might have left the natural world, the natural world didn't leave us." What a powerful reminder! We still get most of our metaphors from nature and whenever people talk about an experience of awe, it is almost always a moment that happens while out in nature, engaging with the natural world. And I think now is an ideal time for us to re-acclimate to this reality that we are a part of wildlife; in fact, we **are** wildlife. And as wildlife, we have a drive

for survival; we have our lizard brains; we follow consistent and cyclical rhythms, and we make necessary adaptations. We form tribes and families, and we have an intrinsic search for safety. We empathize with our fellow humans, and we crave comfort and stability.

As wildlife, we are enough, and we are not enough. We make progress, we build tools, we create language. We survive pandemics and catastrophes, and we also don't survive them. We regress, we destroy each other, we make love, and we make war. We regularly see the proof that *this too shall pass* as our lives are a constant ebb and flow: success and challenge, joy and sorrow, obstacles and access. We experience privilege and sickness, health and wealth, vanity and humility, fear and hope. These too will pass. Life doesn't stop moving. We are adequate, but we are mortal. We are flawed, and we are complex.

I'm drawn to stories with complex heroes--people with flaws and challenges, disabilities and limitations. I'm interested in heroes who cry and show vulnerability--the ones who admit to the moments where they're not enough, when they can't do it on their own. Hence, I'm not usually that interested in superhero books or movies as a rule. And I'm especially bored by the ones with simplistic discussions of good and evil and the ones with a morality that lacks any gray area. However, I recently watched a superhero movie where the main characters were a group of immortal humans who had been fighting the forces of evil throughout centuries (or even millennia). They still felt pain but couldn't die. And as difficult as it was, they didn't get stuck in self-pity. They kept fighting for the peaceable kingdom...even though it was a battle that never ended.

Can you imagine fighting for justice through multiple lifetimes, multiple generations? We humble mortals won't experience that fight, but it was interesting to note that the same forces of evil that were at play earlier on in the lives of the immortal superheroes (the racism, xenophobia, and religious in-fighting from the Crusades through every other imaginable war), these same forces are still at play. These problems aren't new; they are just old enough to have adapted to new times, utilizing new technologies. It takes most of our lifetimes to learn and then unlearn the systems of dominance that threaten the life and the livelihood of those living on the margins.

It takes true power and strong sustained action and activism to dismantle those oppressive systems which hold us and others down. It takes our presence and attention. We must know our place in the work--we must know where we are needed. When our neighbors choose to speak out about their pain and suffering, we have the choice to listen and then to amplify those stories and experiences that so moved us. There is no need for silence. Speak up. Speak out. Act up.

Local poet Danez Smith writes powerfully about their experience living as a gay black nonbinary person in the Twin Cities. "Look closely," they say, "& you'll find a funeral frothing in the corners of my mouth, my mouth hungry for prayer." Smith breaks the hearts of their readers by directly addressing them while describing a scene where a mother encounters her dead child.

reader, it's morning again  
& somewhere, a mother

is pulling her hands  
across her seed's cold shoulders

kissing what's left  
of his face. where

is her joy? what's she to do with a child

who'll spoil soon?  
& what of the child?

what was their last dream?  
who sang to them

while the world closed  
into dust?

...  
i have no more room for grief.

it's everywhere now.  
listen to my laugh

& if you pay attention  
you'll hear a wake.

Smith paints these haunting images of death and decay, pain and destruction, but then they also chose a bold and life-affirming title for their book: "Don't Call Us Dead." Smith is deftly holding these opposing tensions in balance. They have fought for a joy birthed from despair, and they are looking ahead toward reform. But their poems refuse to part with the urgency of now, the abundance of now--even if that abundance is an abundance of grief.

In Smith's poem "not an elegy," they speak of a mouth hungry for a prayer, and then that prayer comes at the end of the book:

let ruin end here

let him find honey  
where there was once a slaughter

let him enter the lion's cage  
& find a field of lilacs

let this be the healing  
& if not let it be

In the text of this poem, Smith separates those final two phrases with a few extra spaces: "If not let it be." Smith leaves space for the reader--for action, for possibility, for a breath, for heartbreak. In essence, they might also be saying, "This too shall pass...and if not let it be." How can we build it back again? The peaceable kingdom? And how do we balance Danez Smith's overflowing grief with the optimism of Rosemary Feeney Harding? For her:

There is no scarcity. There is no shortage. No lack of love,  
of compassion, of joy in the world. There is enough.  
There is more than enough. Only fear and greed make us think otherwise.  
No one need starve. There is enough land and enough food.  
No one need die of thirst. There is enough water. No one  
need live without mercy. There is no end to grace. And we  
are all instruments of grace...There is no scarcity of love.  
There is plenty. And always more.

And Harding was a black woman who lived through the Civil Rights movement; her optimism was hard-fought and deep. She believed in a spilling over of grace--an abundance of grace, just like Danez Smith speaks of a

spilling over of grief. This grace and this grief both contribute to the abundance of now, and they animate our closing hymn:

Though days be dark with storms  
and burdens weigh my heart,  
though troubles wait at every turn  
I know (*I know*), I can (*I can*) go on.

September 2020 didn't get our permission to start. We didn't sign off on this. But September 2020 is here--ready or not. I know we can go on. If we are to know our place and be present to our present--we must say that we are here, in the now, in this space-time continuum.

If you haven't taken adequate time yet to grieve your losses or adapt to our new reality, please do that. If you've done some of that work, kudos. I celebrate with you, but let's prepare for more. I know we can go on. Maybe we'll never go back to a time where we feel disconnected with the suffering of the world. Maybe we'll always be affected by our neighbors' heartbreak, and maybe we'll allow our neighbors to help us hold ours.

Let's take time right now to rest in the middle of things, as Helen put it so plainly when she lit our chalice. And when we're ready to pick back up, let's prepare ourselves for the winter months. There might be many storms--both literal and figurative. There will be darkness--many more hours of darkness than in the summer, but there is also an abundance of love, and an abundance of grace.

No one else can be present to your present--that is a duty and a privilege that is yours and yours alone. May we hold that privilege dearly. May we know our time and our place. May we rest in the middle of things, and may we grow in our fallow seasons. I have no more room for grief, yet let this be the healing. Thread by thread, we are woven together by the strands of pain and suffering, broken bodies, cold shoulders, ruin and slaughter, joy that comes in the morning and mornings where joy doesn't come, lions and lambs, fields of lilacs, moments of grace, off days and on days. There is enough, there is not enough. This too shall pass...and if not let it be. May it be so, and make it so. Amen.

**HYMN    Every Night and Every Morn**

Every night and every morn  
Some to misery are born;  
Every night and ever night  
Some are born to sweet delight.

Joy and woe are woven fine;  
Clothing for the soul divine:  
Under every grief and pine  
Runs a joy with silken twine.

It is right it should be so:  
We were made for joy and woe;  
And when this we rightly know,  
Safely through the world we go.

#### **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 various locations.  
Stay well and stay connected, everyone.  
So be it. See to it. Amen.

**POSTLUDE Andante** (GP Telemann; performed by Polly and Russell Dedrick)