

**Full Text of the Service at White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church
Sunday, October 11, 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.

Gate Gate

Gate, gate, parasamgate, Bodhi Svaha. (Going, going, going on beyond, always going on beyond, always becoming Buddha; crossing over, going beyond.)

GIVING VOICE TO THE SPIRIT

Filled with Loving Kindness (Buddhist Tonglen Chant)

May I be filled with loving kindness, may I be well.
May I be filled with loving kindness, may I be well.
May I be peaceful and at ease, may I be whole.

May you be filled with loving kindness, may you be well.
May you be filled with loving kindness, may you be well.
May you be peaceful and at ease, may you be whole.

May we be filled with loving kindness, may we be well.
May we be filled with loving kindness, may we be well.
May we be peaceful and at ease, may we be whole.

I've Got a New Name (African American Spiritual; adapted by Carol Caouette)

I've got a new name over the Jordan.
I've got a new name over the Jordan.
I've got a new name over the Jordan.
And it's mine, it's mine, it's mine, I declare it's mine.

I'll sing a new song over the Jordan.
I'll sing a new song over the Jordan.
I'll sing a new song over the Jordan.
And it's mine, it's mine, it's mine, I declare it's mine.

I'll find a new way over the Jordan.
I'll find a new way over the Jordan.

I'll find a new way over the Jordan.
And it's mine, it's mine, it's mine, I declare it's mine.

I've got a new life over the Jordan.
I've got a new life over the Jordan.
I've got a new life over the Jordan.
And it's mine, it's mine, it's mine, I declare it's mine.

WELCOME

Good morning, and welcome everyone, to White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church. I am Kathy Sedro, 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. Jack Gaede, Amy Peterson Derrick, Rev. Victoria Safford, and Carol Caouette, supported by Anna Gehres and Erin Scott. Music today is from Carol Caouette, the WBUUC Choir directed by Thaxter Cunio, Mary Duncan, Polly Meyerding-Dedrick, and Russell 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.

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.

Janet Kortuem and Peter Nord will light the chalice.

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

[Text not available]

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

OPENING HYMN #6 SLT Just As Long As I Have Breath (pre-recording)

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

Just as long as vision lasts, I must answer, 'Yes' to truth;
in my dream and in my dark, always: that elusive spark.
If they ask what I did well, tell them I said, 'Yes' to truth.

Just as long as my heart beats, I must answer, 'Yes' to love;
disappointment pierced me through, still I kept on loving you.
If they ask what I did best, tell them I said, 'Yes' to love.

STORY

We Light This Chalice

This morning's story is based on a true story shared many years ago by a UU minister from Michigan. It's a story about a family; a parent and a child named Sam...and a really bad day. But this story isn't just about Sam and their mom; it is also a story about how we live our UU faith each and every day, and about how we continue to weave the story of our faith in all that we do.

The day hadn't started out too badly for Sam—Sam had gotten out of bed and prepared for school just like any other day. The day started with a stretch, and brushing teeth and getting dressed in a favorite cozy outfit. Sam packed a lunch, ate breakfast and kissed their mom goodbye before heading out the door to school.

But once Sam got to school, things started to go wrong. First, it was one small thing, then it was another, then another and another... Until pretty soon, Sam felt sad and angry and... as sometimes happens when you are feeling overwhelmed... Sam found they were making choices that were not helping the day get any better. In fact, some of these choices got Sam into trouble. (Has that ever happened to you?)

By the end of the day, Sam didn't feel any less sad or angry or overwhelmed; especially not when the teacher handed Sam a letter to take home to give to mom.

Sam took the letter and shoved it into their backpack, crumpling it up, hoping that nobody else saw what had happened. On the short walk home from school, Sam's mind started racing: "What am I going to tell my mom? What was mom going to say? Was she going to be angry? Disappointed?

I wish this day had never happened, thought Sam.

This day just felt...awful.

Sam arrived at the doorstep and slowly walked into the house, and plopped down at the kitchen table, where Sam was greeted by their mom. "How was your day?" Sam's mom asked.

"fine..." said Sam softly.

"Just fine? Did anything interesting happen today?"

"No! Nothing!" Shouted Sam "I don't want to talk about it, okay?"

Sam's mom put a hand on Sam's shoulder, "what happened? Is everything okay?"

Sam didn't say a word.

Sam's mom took a deep breath and asked Sam for their backpack. She reached in and found the crumpled up letter. Sam looked down at the table, not wanting to see mom's face as she read the note.

Sam felt angry.

Sam felt embarrassed.

Sam felt like crying.

"Sam," said their mom gently "I can see that you are pretty upset right now. Do you need a few minutes before we talk about this?"

Sam nodded.

"That's okay. I think I might need a few minutes, too. Why don't we each take some time to relax a little before we chat? Let's meet back here when we are both ready to bring our best selves back to the table."

They both agreed that this was a good idea, so Sam took a deep breath and nodded their head.

"I love you," said Sam's Mom "I'll be right here."

As Sam walked up the stairs to their bedroom, they noticed the pit in their stomach had already started to go away. And, after a while, Sam felt ready to talk about it.

When Sam came back into the kitchen, mom was already sitting at the table, and had set out two teacups.

"What are those for?" Asked Sam.

"Well, " said Sam's mom. "I find that sometimes when I have had a hard day, or had to learn a hard lesson, it helps me to have a hot cup of tea. It helps me find my calm center when things around me don't feel so calm. I thought you might like to try a cup of tea, too." Sam nodded their head. Sam liked the idea of sharing a cup of tea with mom.

Then, Sam had an idea, "I'll be right back!" They said.

A moment later, Sam arrived back at the table with something in their hand.

"What is this?" asked Sam's mom.

"It's my chalice. It helps me remember to listen and learn, and to try to be my best self. It reminds me of love."

Mom smiled and said, "That's a great idea. I think I need that reminder, too. Would you like to say any special words before we light the chalice?"

Sam thought about it a little, then said the words that they remembered learning in church:

We light this chalice to remind ourselves,

To be loving and kind,

To listen and learn,

To grow and serve.

This light reminds us that together we are strong.

Sam and their mom agreed that from then on, they would light a chalice and share a cup of tea any time they needed help learning a hard new lesson or needed to have a tough conversation. And so they did.

MEDITATION

Let's join in a spirit of prayer.

Settle your body in your space, wherever you are.

Settle your spirit.

Wherever you are, you are part of us, part of us all, we are part of each other, holding one another in memory and breath.

We're finding new ways to understand community- here, for example, this morning, trusting that even physically apart, we are a communion of brave hearts, even when we feel afraid.

We are a communion of sturdy companions, even when we feel shaky and alone.

Spirit of life, spirit of love,
steady us.

Anchor us in hope this morning.

Help us remember

That all around the world right now

Scientists are working, across the borders of nationality, language, or religion, they are working toward a Covid vaccine.

For all of us, they're working day and night.

Anchor us in hope today.

Help us remember

That all around the world right now

Artists are shaping new beauty,

Composers are making new music,
starting to hum into the air the songs that they hear in their heads.

Poets right now are wrapping new words

around our unspeakable fears and our dreams.

All over this world right now, whether waking, like us, to a beautiful morning, or greeting the evening, ready for rest,

All over this world people are speaking small gritudes,

for the day ahead, for the day just past,

for all the days and nights they've known so far,

for the gift that is this life, even when it's hard.

Anchor us in hope today, steady us in hope,

For all around this world are people making beauty, shaping love, giving thanks,
Even though they're frightened, even though they're tired,
even though it sometimes seems that all is lost.

It's not.

For we are not alone.

For a few moments, we'll hold silence together.

I invite you to speak now, silently or out loud, the name of those you're holding in your heart
today, those whose sorrows and joys are your sorrow and joy, the ones you hold in love and care.

Spirit, hold them all, hold us all, in love and gratitude, and hope.

Amen

OFFERING

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

OFFERTORY MUSIC *It Is Something To Have Wept* Robert L Sanders (Carol Caouette, piano)

READINGS

The first reading is from Rebecca Goldstein:

“What is it that makes a person the very person that she is, herself alone and not another, an integrity of identity that persists over time, undergoing changes and yet still continuing to be...

I stare at the picture of a small child at a summer's picnic, clutching her big sister's hand with one tiny hand while in the other she has a precarious hold on a big slice of watermelon that she appears to be struggling to have intersect with the small “o” of her mouth. That child is me. But why is she me? I have no memory at all of that summer's day, no privileged knowledge of whether that child succeeded in getting the watermelon into her mouth. It's true that a smooth series of contiguous physical events can be traced from her body to mine, so that we would want to say that her body is mine; and perhaps bodily identity is all that our personal identity consists in. But bodily persistence over time, too, presents philosophical dilemmas.

The series of contiguous physical events has rendered the child's body so different from the one I glance down on at this moment; the very atoms that composed her body no longer compose mine. And if our bodies are dissimilar, our points of view are even more so. Mine would be as inaccessible to her ... as hers is now to me. Her thought processes, prelinguistic, would largely elude me.”

The second reading is from Levar Burton's podcast called "Levar Burton Reads"

"If we are to grow and change...if we are to maximize our potential in this life, we must develop the skill of rigorous self-introspection and then be willing to make the changes necessary in order to continue to move forward in a positive, proactive manner.

To continue to strive to do better, be better, but to really work on it. And the work...Boy! It's so worth it, and it ain't easy...And the thought that I might without the work be the same person I was a decade or two or three ago...wow!

The dread that comes up when I put myself in that frame of mind, when I pose that question: What if you were the same person you were three decades ago...that is a thought that fills me with dread.

The fear is real, and I firmly believe that so long as we do not allow the fear to paralyze us into non-action...as Kendrick Lamar says, 'We Gon' Be Alright.'

MUSIC **The Coolin**, an Irish Air (Mary Duncan, piano)

SERMON **Letting the Leaves Fall**

Our two readings this morning come to the same conclusion but from different directions. Both are arguing that change happens drastically and broadly enough that we are not the same people that we were decades ago...at least not in any sensible way. Rebecca Goldstein seems to be a little sad about this lack of continuity, whereas Levar Burton seems to imply that a lack of change would be dreadful. For him, growth and change are necessary, just as they are for Lauren--the main character in "Parable of the Sower" by Octavia Butler. Lauren teaches many parables about change, the inevitability of change, and the need to stay flexible and adaptable so the changes don't break us. She says, "All that you touch you change, and all that you change changes you." She argues against the belief in a God that is immovable and unchanging, saying instead "God is change," just like the scientists who challenge the idea that stone is simply inert matter. When talking about stone, nature writer Robert McFarlane says it feels "like a liquid briefly paused in its flow. Seen in deep time, stone folds as strata, gouts as lava, floats as plates, shifts as shingle. Over aeons, rock absorbs, transforms, levitates from seabed to summit." And if rock transforms, surely humans do as well.

But this transformation seems sad for Rebecca Goldstein. She points us to the philosophical challenge that lies in finding the strand of what we call our personal identity. She asks, "What is it that makes a person the very person that she is, herself alone and not another, an integrity of identity that persists over time, undergoing changes and yet still continuing to be?" It seems like she is searching for the common thread. She wants to know what connects our current selves to our former selves--especially what connects her (the writer) to the little girl eating watermelon in the picture that she has seen. She has no memory of that day, but she concedes that the person in that bodily existence has somehow morphed and traveled and become her, retaining some strand of identity and similarity. She says:

The series of contiguous physical events has rendered the child's body so different from the one I glance down on at this moment; the very atoms that composed her body no longer compose mine. And if our bodies are dissimilar, our points of view are even more so. Mine would be as inaccessible to her ... as hers is now to me.

With all these differences and changes and transformations established, I begin to search for a common thread, and the primary one that I find is a common narrator. We narrate our own lives. We tell our stories--even the ones that we don't remember, the ones that are told to us by grandparents, parents, and siblings. And as the narrator, we can always rewrite the story. We can change the narrative, tell different stories, create new characters, imagine new ways of being, reframe old wounds, and reform old patterns of behavior.

I have certainly undergone this process of reformation myself--celebrating new identities, finding new passions, focusing on different interests, and prioritizing different dreams and visions. At times, I accepted different assumptions and labels, acquiring my value and my identity through different means. I have belonged to multiple tribes. Ironically, my childhood religious life centered on a reformer named Martin Luther. But when I questioned too much of his thinking and wanted to reform his thoughts even further, the church ran out of room for me. In my religious education, I was taught about the importance of reform, but that reform had limits.

And what about the the way our lives are currently being reformed--with or without our permission or approval? Where do we still have agency? We have agency in our reactions, in the way we handle and navigate the changes that come our way. We benefit when we put in place rituals to foster and nurture that agency. Those rituals help provide a crucial structure for us when the systems around us are getting toppled--whether they are the structures of democracy and decency or the systems by which we decide which monuments adorn our public spaces.

Just recently, I helped a friend put his sailboat away for the winter. It wasn't until I was helping take down the cables, ropes, sails, and mast that I realized how it all held together--how it actually harnessed the wind. There were straps and pins and buckles and rings and knots, and it all seemed so tenuous. But there is a difference between tenuous and deconstructable. We were able to take it apart with care and precision, and hopefully in the spring we will be able to put it back together again. The cycles of life revolve and turn--repeating again and again.

Another cycle that has caught my eye is the 24-hour news cycle, specifically the political news. I don't know about you, but I've been following quite a bit of it lately. And at the same time, I've been reading and hearing from experts who are studying the negative impact of political hobbyism, which is a new term for me. These scholars define political hobbyism as the potentially obsessive way that some of us follow the happenings of political news at the expense of getting engaged in real political activism or wielding real political power. If your only real engagement is voting or armchair political punditry, then there's a real chance that you're watching more political news than you need. These scholars make a really helpful analogy to sportscasters and sports analysts and the sports fans who have the jerseys and buy the merch and spend a lot of their time and energy focused on whether their team will win but who don't do much to actualize that win besides cheering for their team.

Some people have rightly called political hobbyism an addiction, and I think they may be right. How many of you know someone who can't go to bed until they get their fix of the news? I'd say that "I'm just asking for a friend," but I'd be lying. I know that I've been that person sometimes;

maybe some of you have too. If I can read about a political rival or enemy making some giant mistake or getting caught in a scandal or displaying hypocrisy or even contracting sickness, then maybe I can get my little bit of dopamine. Maybe I can feel that fleeting moment of schadenfreude, right? “Happiness at the misfortune of others,” or more literally, from the German, “joy at someone else’s harm.” When it’s defined that way, I feel more guilty about it. However, I can also choose to view my feelings of schadenfreude as helpful data for me to understand myself. In reality, it says more about me than it does about my political rival.

I’m trying to be a good citizen and to stay informed, because (on a good day) I believe that up-to-date information helps inform our political action and our voting patterns. But in the process, I’m feeling overwhelmed, and I’m starting to doubt whether it’s actually helpful for me to pay this much attention to every detail and every new story. I’ve been trying to moderate my consumption of political news, trying to control and minimize the flow of information coming at me--lest it become an immobilizing firehose of despondency and despair. Otherwise, that despair might become so heavy that it might paralyze me into non-action. But as Levar Burton reminds us, we must lift ourselves out of that non-action by doing the work of striving to do better, to be better. He says, “If we are to grow and change...we must develop the skill of rigorous self-introspection and then be willing to make the changes necessary in order to continue to move forward in a positive, proactive manner.”

In this spirit, I’m taking an intentional step back from my own desperate attachment to the political news, and I invite you to join me. I’m thinking about the wisdom of putting things away for a season. I’m thinking about the way that a captain folds the sails carefully, washes the hull, and cleans algae off the rudder. The gardener harvests the final squash, takes down the trellises, and puts the bed to rest for the winter. The homeowner cleans the gutters and rakes the leaves. The student carefully folds and stores up the absolute freedom that they feel in the summer, but they don’t stow it away too deeply. They return to it again over MEA weekend, and again throughout

the fall, winter break, spring break, etc. It's not gone forever--it's just tucked away to be used again soon.

These seasonal cycles have been on my mind lately. I guess the changing colors of the trees force the conversation: the saffron, the rust, the mahogany, the rose, and the sunset orange. These trees drop their leaves for the winter as an absolutely necessary step to their survival. If they didn't, the snow would fall on them and stick to the leaves. The branches would get so heavy with the wet snow, they would snap off from the trunk. The tree would literally lose its limbs and possibly its life. It drops its leaves in the fall for survival. It must simplify--down to the bare necessities. What are the things that we must let go of this winter so that we can survive the heavy snowfall, the icy temps, and the frigid winds of change that sweep through every winter?

I've been reading a beautiful book by Louise Erdrich geared towards children and youth called "The Birchbark House." It is set in 1847, and it's about an Indigenous family living through the harsh winter on the Island of the Golden-Breasted Woodpecker, or as it is now known Madeline Island. It's a beautiful story, and Erdrich paints a very different picture of survival than did Laura Ingalls Wilder writing about a similar time and around the same region of the country--Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. In Erdrich's book, we meet an Ojibwe family (or as they would say in their language--an Anishinaabe family). We observe them as they prepare for winter in all the ways we might expect--tanning buffalo hides for moccasins and other warm clothes, storing up all the food that they can, and collecting beaver pelts and other marketable goods for trading. But there was one thing that they couldn't prepare for--and this will definitely be a spoiler, but at this point in the book, it has been foreshadowed.

Virtually everyone in their village gets sick with smallpox--except our 7-year-old protagonist Omakayas or "Little Frog." In the middle of winter, the whole family gets sick--her two brothers, one sister, mother, father, and Nokomis (the Anishinaabe word for Grandmother). But Omakayas never gets sick, because she has already survived smallpox once before. When she was a tiny girl, her first family's village endured a smallpox epidemic, and she was the sole

survivor. Her second family adopted her when she was very young, and she didn't even know that.

She didn't remember the first smallpox epidemic, just like Rebecca Goldstein didn't remember eating the watermelon. But since Omakayas didn't get sick, she was able to nurse her own family back to health--just like they had done for her years before. This cyclical element of the story really intrigues me, and there is much hope to be gleaned from a story where a family (mostly) survives an epidemic in the middle of a harsh winter.

How are you preparing for the upcoming winter? How are you thinking about your neighbor's survival? Remember back in March and April when so many of our thoughts and so much of our energy went to supporting the most vulnerable. What leaves do you need to drop? Which patterns and ways of thinking are actually unhelpful and weigh you down too much? Which burdens could you lay down? And what hopes and rituals and rhythms are helping you lately? During this pandemic, we have the opportunity to find real clarity--to refine our purposes, to focus our energy, to cut away the chaff of unnecessary patterns that aren't serving us well. We now get to ask the question: "In what ways will I attempt to survive this winter?" We don't know yet if we or our democracy will survive, but we do know that we want to contribute to the survival of both. And we can know how we want to react to our world's changing seasons and how we want to manage our own energy and investment in ensuring that we live the truth that Kendrick Lamar has predicted for us: "We Gon' Be Alright."

In what ways are you going to act up this winter? Here's a list of examples I've heard so far. One person is moving to live with a family member out-of-state so that neither of them will be alone. One person is continuing her practice of daily journaling to keep attending to her needs and noticing the changes in herself. One family has created a pod with another family for mutual support--literally re-forming their family structure for the season. One person is celebrating the fact that he has more time on his hands to engage in the political action and activism that feeds his spirit and secures a better world for his grandchildren. One couple I know has taken the step to do

what's best for both of them and start the process of separation, which is a hard thing to do in a regular time, and it is made even harder to do during this challenging time. But for them, it is the next right thing. One family has committed to light a chalice every night before dinner, like our family in the story that Amy shared with us. They will say:

We light this chalice to remind ourselves,
To be loving and kind,
To listen and learn,
To grow and serve.
This light reminds us that together we are strong.

What is it for you? How are you reforming? Re-imagining? Reframing? How are you taking action right now? How are you using this moment to be mindful, to get clear about your needs and your capacity? Maybe the acting up you need to do right now is reaching for help. Maybe you want to get involved in a project so that you can feel like you're giving as well as receiving. Or maybe it's finding a new support system. Maybe some of your old connections or patterns need to be cut loose or cut out completely. Sometimes before things can be re-formed, they need to be broken apart. Let's hold silence for a few moments.

May your brokenness lead to repair. May you lay down the unhelpful patterns and heavy burdens, letting them fall like leaves. May your simple and bare branches lift to the sky, ready for the winter--come what may. May we build toward a new and different path. And may you feel support from the earth, from your roots, and from your fellow trees. We are in this together. May it be so, and make it so. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN #1017 STJ Building a New Way

We are building a new way
We are building a new way
We are building a new way, feeling stronger every day
We are building a new way.

We are working to be free.
We are working to be free.
We are working to be free of hate and greed and jealousy

We are working to be free.

We can feed our every need

We can feed our every need

We can feed our every need; start with love, that is the seed.

We can feed our every need.

Peace and freedom is our cry.

Peace and freedom is our cry.

Peace and freedom is our cry; without these our world will die.

Peace and freedom is our cry.

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

Siciliana (G.P. Telemann) Polly Meyerding-Dedrick and Russell Dedrick, flutes