

PRELUDE MUSIC

Come Into This Place of Peace

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.

Spirit of Life

Spirit of life, come unto me
Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion
Blow in the wind, rise in the sea
Move in the hand giving life the shape of justice.
Roots hold me close, wings set me free,
Spirit of life, come to me, come to me.

GIVING VOICE TO THE SPIRIT - Carol Caouette

All This Joy

*All this joy, all this sorrow
All this promise, all this pain
Such is life, such is being
Such is spirit, such is love
Such is spirit, such is love*

*City of joy, city of sorrow
City of promise, city of pain
Such is life, such is being
Such is spirit, such is love
Such is spirit, such is love*

*World of joy, world of sorrow
World of promise, world of pain
Such is life, such is being
Such is spirit, such is love
Such is spirit, such is love*

*All this joy, all this sorrow
All this promise, all this pain
Such is life, such is being
Such is spirit, such is love
Such is spirit, such is love*

Strong is What We Make Each Other

Strong is what we make each other
Strong is what we make each other
Flowing through me, flowing through you
Birthing life, birthing life.

Pain and vision intertwining
Pain and vision intertwining
Flowing through me, flowing through you
Birthing life, birthing life.

Love and justice guide our journey
Love and justice guide our journey
Flowing through me, flowing through you
Birthing life, birthing life.

WELCOME - Laurie Wenker

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

Service participants today include Victoria Safford, Amy Peterson Derrick, _____ and Rev. Sara Goodman, supported by Erin Scott and Anna Gehres. Music today is from Carol Caouette, Charlotte's Web ensemble, and the WBUUC Choir, directed by Thaxter Cunio.

If you are newer to our congregation and are looking for more information, join Jack Gaede after the service for Newcomer Orientation, Also today, after the service at 11:15, we hope that you will join us for Cyber Social Hour. We'll put the Zoom links in the chat box.

Our 2021 Pledge Campaign has started strong! As of this morning we have raised \$ _____, toward our goal of \$ 920,000, with pledges received from _____ households, all to support the programs of our beloved church community. This year, as we look forward to planning a return to inperson gatherings, it matters more than ever that we get our pledges in on time. There's a link in the chat so you can do it today!

We'll hear next from congregation members about why this matters. Welcome, everyone, to our church. Together we grow our souls and serve the world.

2021 PLEDGE CAMPAIGN videos (no text available): Dana Boyle; Evan Boyd

CALL TO WORSHIP - Victoria Safford (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.

Jane Harper and John Velin will light the chalice.

LIGHTING THE CHALICE Jane Harper and John Velin (no text 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

HYMN - Come and Find the Quiet Center

Come and find the quiet center
In the crowded life we lead.
Find the room for hope to enter,
Find the frame where we are freed.
Clear the chaos and the clutter,
Clear our eyes that we can see
All the things that really matter,
Be at peace and simply be.

Silence is a friend who claims us,
Cools the heat and slows the pace.
God it is who speaks and names us,
Knows our being, touches base.
Making space within our thinking,
Lifting shades to show the sun.
Raising courage when we're shrinking,
Finding scope for faith begun.

In the Spirit let us travel,
Open to each other's pain.
Let our loves and fears unravel,
Celebrate the space we gain.
There's a place for deepest dreaming,
There's a time for heart to care.
In the spirit's lively scheming,
there is always room to spare.

STORY - Amy Peterson Derrick

THE THREE QUESTIONS by Leo Tolstoy

Adapted by Amy Peterson Derrick

Sam wanted more than anything to be a kind and loving friend. You could often find Sam laying on a grassy hillside, or perched on the branch of a tree, pondering just this. On one particular day, as Sam laid on a favorite hillside, the sun just warm enough to keep the cool spring breeze from feeling too cold-- it occurred to Sam that if only they always knew just the right time to begin everything; who was the most important person to listen to; and what was the most important thing to do, then Sam could indeed be a kind and loving friend.

And so, Sam decided to ask the people they loved most the answers to these questions:

When is the right time?

Who is the most important one?

And what is the most important thing to do?

Sam's best friend said that to know the right time, one must make a plan and stick to it no matter what. Sam's mom said that no one person could know everything, so it was important to have a circle of wise friends. Sam's sibling said that there is no way to know what the most important thing to do is unless you can see into the future--so to answer this question, you must be a magician. Sam wasn't so sure.

But still wishing to find the right answers to these three questions, Sam decided to ask a wise teacher named Joy, who lived next door.

The next day, Sam was delighted to find their neighbor outside, working in the garden. Seeing Sam, Joy was delighted, and greeted them with a warm smile, then turned back to her work. Sam was surprised to find that Joy seemed tired, and breathed heavily with each turn of the spade into the earth.

Sam carefully approached Joy, "Excuse me," said Sam, "I see that you are busy, but I wondered if I helped you if you might have time to help me with a few questions that I have been wondering about."

Joy looked up again and smiled. "Of course, Sam. I would be so grateful for your help."

And so, Sam started digging and asked their questions

When is the right time?

Who is the most important one?

And what is the most important thing to do?

Joy smiled, but before she could say anything, they heard a strange noise coming from the bushes.

"Just a moment," said Joy, "Let us see what that is." as they carefully crept closer, they found an injured rabbit tucked in behind the bushes.

"Well," said Joy, "It seems that this rabbit is in need of some extra care. Sam, we will need a box and some towels to help me transport this poor thing to someone who can give it proper care. Do you think you can help with that?"

Sam quickly ran home and returned with a shoebox lined with soft towels they could find. Joy pulled on her gardening gloves and carefully scooped up the rabbit and placed it in the box. Sam helped Joy to her car and waved goodbye as Joy drove off, then sat down in her yard waiting for to come back.

It wasn't long before Joy returned, and announced to Sam that the rabbit was in good hands and was going to be okay. Sam was relieved but still hadn't forgotten about the three questions.

"Joy" said sam, "I wondered if now would be an okay time to talk about my questions."

Joy sat down next to Sam and smiled, and let out a soft chuckle.

"But Sam, you have already been answered!"

Sam was confused. "How? What do you mean?"

"Don't you see?" replied Joy. "If you had not come to help me earlier, I would have had to dig those gardens all by myself when I was tired! So the most important time was when you were digging in the garden; and I was the most important one; and to help me was the most important thing.

"Then, we heard the injured rabbit, it was the most important one, and what you did for the rabbit was your most important thing."

Sam thought about this.

“...so..” Sam replied carefully, “That means that now is the most important time. And whoever I am with is the most important one....and to do good is the most important thing?”

“You got it, Sam,” replied Joy. “Just keep listening and paying attention to the world around you, and you will be just fine.”

MEDITATION - Rev. Victoria Safford

Let's take a breath here, the breath of life, spirit of life, and pause together in the spirit of rest and readiness that is the spirit of prayer.

For a few moments, trusting that we are bound each to each and each to all in beloved community, let's hold silence together.

Spirit of life and love,
god of a thousand names and beyond all naming,
on this equinox, everything's as if suspended, for a fraction of a second,
like a weighted thread, wound tight, that spins in one direction, then the other.
We're spinning now toward spring, toward green,
held in sacred balance between the hours of darkness and hours of light,
the threshold, the crack in the ice, between winter and what's next.
There's balance here, from night to day, a kind of astronomical holiness in time.
Equinox –
and yet our world is out of balance, our equilibrium uneven,
as we mourn the murder of 8 people in Atlanta,
6 of them Asian American women,
each of them a miracle, a wonderment,
and there is only darkness here, no light.
It's hard to balance hope and outrage,
hope and sorrow,
hope against this hatred and this fear.
Our people breathe, women breathe, our Asian siblings breathe,
in terror, every day.
For the dead and their beloveds,
our prayer now and always is for peace.
And for ourselves, no peace just yet, no rest,
but new courage, new resolve,
to see and name, eradicate, the lethal hate,
and shine more brightly, boldly, relentlessly, unceasingly,
the light of love.

AMEN

INTRODUCTION TO THE OFFERING - Laurie Wenker

Every financial gift to our congregation goes to support the programs we've come to rely on as anchors in our lives: gathering space and materials for children, youth and families, choral rehearsals and music, classes and small groups, justice work and public witness, pastoral care, rites of passage, Sunday services. You can

contribute to the offering today by sending a check, or by following the easy prompt to “text-to-give.” Thank you for your generous support!

OFFERTORY - Be Thou My Vision (from Slane, Irish Folk Melody)

READINGS

The first reading is an excerpt from Recording by Megan Snyder-Camp
Showing at the drive-in, a documentary
on tightrope-walking: a young man frustrated
that his dream, the World Trade Center, was not yet built

so he practiced for years in a meadow crossing intended sky, intent
like a pillowcase sweetening him, no harm . . . Here

let the towers go, let them write his crossing, cursive, back and forth

his name steadying our tongues . . . Famous, overcoat
floating down without him, the idea that we stand

where we mean to stand, 1974, a distraction

from my parents' morning commute.

The second reading is from How It Adds Up BY TONY HOAGLAND

There was the day we swam in a river, a lake, and an ocean.

And the day I quit the job my father got me.

...

There was the morning I was born,
and the year I was a loser,
and the night I was the winner of the prize
for which the audience applauded.

Then there was someone ... I met,
whose face and voice I can't forget,
and the memory of her
is like a jail I'm trapped inside,

or maybe she is something I just use
to hold my real life at a distance.

*Happiness, Joe says, is a wild red flower
plucked from a river of lava
and held aloft on a tightrope
strung between two scrawny trees
above a canyon
in a [blustery] windstorm.*

Don't drop it, Don't drop it, Don't drop it—,

And when you do, you will keep looking for it
everywhere, for years,
while right behind you,
the footprints you are leaving

will look like notes
of a crazy song.

MUSIC Throw It Away (Abbey Lincoln) Carol Caouette

I think about the life I live
A figure made of clay
And think about the things I lost
The things I gave away
And when I'm in a certain mood
I search the house and look
One night I found these magic words
In a magic book
Throw it away
Throw it away
Give your love, live your life
Each and every day
And keep your hand wide open
Let the sun shine through
'Cause you can never lose a thing
If it belongs to you
There's a hand to rock the cradle
And a hand to help us stand
With a gentle kind of motion
As it moves across the land
And the hand's unclenched and open
Gifts of life and love it brings
So keep your hand wide open
If you're needing anything
Throw it away
Throw it away
Give your love, live your life
Each and every day
And keep your hand wide open
Let the sun shine through
'Cause you can never lose a thing
If it belongs to you

SERMON - Lessons from a Tightrope Walker

"Usually balance stands in front of me, I pursue it, if it already belonged to my present I would be standing still."- Andrea Loreni

By the time Philippe Petit finally stepped out onto the tightrope highwire between the twin towers of the World Trade Center on August 7th, 1974 he had already spent 6 years of his life preparing for the walk. He spent most of those years learning and practicing the skills he needed to be successful. He spent months staking out the site, learning everything he could about the schedules, the patterns, the winds, the way the buildings shifted. Since he did not get a permit, or even request one, the walk was highly illegal, and had to be done in secret.

Petit and a team of accomplices worked out the details of how to get the wire to the roof of the unfinished building, how to get it from one tower to the other and how to attach it safely, along with the required stability lines. They thought through every contingency and still many things went wrong. Things they didn't anticipate, couldn't have anticipated went wrong. And they still managed to pull it off. Petit walked across a wire strung between two towers – safely. Not just once, but eight times over 45 minutes before he allowed himself to be arrested.

Over the last year we have been faced with challenge after challenge, pushing and pulling us, twisting us around ourselves. It feels hard to keep our balance. When the winds shift or the ground tilts beneath our feet – when we have to suddenly change our whole lives – it's hard to keep our balance. When we get news that's scary, or upsetting, or infuriating – sometimes all three at once, it's hard to keep our balance. And even as we approach what might be a new normal, a possible ending to all the constant change, we are faced again with another imbalance.

The thing about balance is that it requires constant shifting. It requires strength and concentration and flexibility. And to have those skills on hand it requires practice and presence and perseverance.

We have faced a lot of imbalance over the last year, the last few years, and we are in for some more unstable times ahead. So how do we keep our balance when we aren't on solid ground? When the wire beneath our feet is prone to shifting in the wind and twisting under our footsteps?

Here are some lessons for life and balance from tightrope walkers: Preparation, Presence, and Perseverance. Preparation- doing a highwire act takes meticulous and thorough preparation – including practicing what to do when something unexpected happens. In highwire acts, the wire walkers need to know how to recover their balance when they lose it, and how to hold on to the wire if they fall. Practicing falling is part of the preparation. Improvisation in the face of change is only possible when we've practiced staying nimble.

Well, we've certainly had a lot of practice with uncertainty over the last year, haven't we? We've been through so many things, thought through so many contingencies, prepared and planned and then when we got knocked off balance, we had to find our footing again.

The early days of the pandemic felt intensely surreal and temporary. We thought it would be a few weeks before things got back to normal. Soon we realized that that would be impossible. We had to learn whole new ways to live our lives and quickly. We had to learn how to shift our weight without overbalancing.

A beginner physics lesson in balance: the closer your center of gravity is to the surface you're on the better your balance. So, when you start to lose your balance, bend your knees to get your center of gravity closer to the wire.

When you start to lose your balance in life, find a simple way to bring yourself closer to what grounds you. I find that a moment of intentional breathing deep, slow, with concentration – helps me to find a sense of center, of grounding. What spiritual practices have you been doing to keep you grounded?

Tip two: Presence

One Italian highwire artist and Zen Buddhist practitioner, Andrea Loreni, speaks of his fear as being present with him before every walk, and how important it is to make friends with that fear; to understand what it's telling you. He shares this wisdom: "When I have already one foot on the wire and I am about to lift the other from the ground, in that moment, before suspension, fear comes by and whispers in my ear – Stop. ... And by now I've got to know well this whispered word of fear, and I know that what fear shows me as the most important thing is nothing but the ballast I have to let go of if I want to fly."

This performer and philosopher is skilled at staying present, having practiced meditation and tightrope walking for many years. He describes what's required in the mind to stay present on the wire: "If I would think about what I am doing on the wire (taking a step, a bit unbalanced, straightening the pole), soon I would be thinking about how I'm falling. When I am on the wire, I have to let my body do – I have to get rid of any thought and to become exactly what I do."

When walking on a wire there is nothing except presence. If you are thinking about something else, if you get distracted for a moment, the rope twisting beneath you will take you by surprise and it's all done.

In our lives, when striving for balance, we can learn the most about ourselves and our situations when we are present in the moment. If we are able to let go of our monkey minds that tell us that we aren't good enough, that there is too much to do, that we aren't up to the task, then we will be able to make friends with our fear – and be able to let it go.

Loreni says “[we need to] let go of the well-known in order to perceive the unknown in all of its vastness.” To perceive the unknown in all of its vastness, to stare into the void and embrace the impermanence of everything – this time will only last a little while, the good the bad, they will all pass us by in an instant, and if we aren't paying attention, staying present, we miss it.

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Another mini lesson – this time from social sciences: We are not meant to be alone. No matter how much it looks like there are lone wolves, brave folks who walk out onto the wire alone, the walk would never be possible if they were truly alone. In order to be ready for anything you have to and have a team to support you. Philippe Petit had a minimum of 5 people helping in the moment of his walk and even more who helped plan and prepare.

To be good at balance, we need to have a team of folks who will help – cheer when you need cheering, quiet stillness when you need to focus, to rush in and gather you up when you fall. There is no such thing as living this life without other people. We've learned that the hard way this year, we are not meant to be alone.

As we face another tragedy, 8 lives cut short in Atlanta, murders fueled by fear and hate, by white supremacy, misogyny, racism, and misguided religion, we need to remember this the final tip from a tightrope walker: Perseverance.

Hard, bad and unexpected things happen – we do our best to prepare, we stay present in the moment as much as we can, and there is always that variable we cannot account for – the tragedy, the unknown coming to meet us. It is so easy to think that if you know all of the answers, if you plan and practice and stay present that things will go the way we planned them, but we know, we should remember by now that we aren't in control of everything. The only part of our lives that we can control is how we deal with the unexpected.

The thing is, preparation and the presence and a team of folks around us makes perseverance possible. We know that we can find new ways to keep moving toward a goal, because we've practiced some new ways (not this one, true, but some), when we find grounding and presence in the moment, we can look for the new way with grace. When we have a group of people prepared to help pick us up when we stumble, we can persevere. We face the unknown every day, every moment, and we keep our balance by preparing, being present, and persevering when we think we can't go on.

Let's take a moment to ground ourselves, find our center, and breathe together.

Our closing hymn, a well-practiced favorite, is Spirit of Life, #123 in the Singing the Living Tradition (hardcover hymnal)

HYMN - Spirit of Life Singing the Living Tradition #123

Spirit of life, come unto me
Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion
Blow in the wind, rise in the sea
Move in the hand giving life the shape of justice.
Roots hold me close, wings set me free,
Spirit of life, come to me, come to me.

CLOSING WORDS Laurie Wenker

Please join me in the 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 - Victoria Safford

Thanks, everyone, for joining us today. If you're new to our church and want to learn more, there's a mini-orientation right after the service. And all are welcome to join us at 11:15 for cyber social hour - a wonderful way to connect with friends old and new. The link to both gatherings in the chat box

Please remember to make a pledge, if you're able, to support our church financially.

And, for our Easter service coming up, we're seeking your pictures for a slideshow. Recent or vintage, send photos of yourself or your family. We're all ready for glimpses of spring and renewal. We are sending you love from 328 Maple, and Stillwater, St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Woodbury. Be well, friends.

POSTLUDE Gonna Sing When the Spirit Says Sing - WBUUC Choir?