

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.

Waitin' (William Bolcom) Becky Pansch & Carol Caouette

Waitin' waitin'

I've been waitin'

Waitin' waitin' all my life.

That light keeps on hiding from me,

But it someday just might bless my sight.

Waitin' waitin' waitin'

GIVING VOICE TO THE SPIRIT - Carol Caouette

Freedom Begins in Your Heart

Chorus

Freedom begins in your heart

Freedom begins in your heart

Freedom begins in your heart

Freedom begins in your heart

Let my voice begin to sing and speak from my heart

Let my voice begin to sing and speak from my heart

Let my feet begin to dance and move with my voice

Let my feet begin to dance and move with my voice

Loosen, Loosen

Loosen, loosen baby, you don't have to carry
the weight of the world on your muscles and bones,
let go, let go, let go.

Holy breath and holy name, will you ease,

Will you ease this pain.

WELCOME - Jillian Lampert

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

Service participants today include Rev. Sara Goodman, Nico Van Ostrand and Victoria Safford, supported by Erin Scott and Anna Gehres. Music today is from Carol Caouette, Craig Hansen, Becky Pansch, the Charlotte's Web Ensemble, Peter Mayer and the Choir, directed by Thaxter Cunio.

If you are new to our community we would like to welcome you to a Newcomer orientation right after the service with one of our ministry staff. After the service today, at 11:15, plan to join us for Cyber Social Hour - a half-hour of community conversation - a great way to meet friends old and new. We'll put the Zoom link in the chat box.

Also, you will want to watch the eNews this week: you can sign up for spring and summer Courtyard Gatherings, in-person, here at church! These gatherings will feature our Flower Communion and a ritual walk through the sanctuary. You don't want to miss it. Those gatherings will be starting later this month, and other in-person gatherings are coming soon.

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

CALL TO WORSHIP - Rev. 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.

Stephanie Magers will light the chalice.

LIGHTING THE CHALICE Stephanie Magers (no text available)

OPENING WORDS (in unison) Rev. Goodman

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 There's a River Flowin' in My Soul STJ#1007

STORY - Nico Van Ostrand

This morning's story is called "Beautiful Hands" by Barb Pitman, from uu&me! Collected Stories. As I share this story, and perhaps again at some point this afternoon, I invite you to imagine what this story is calling you to do--for yourself, and for the people in your circle.

She was bewildered. Bewildered and ashamed. The other hands in the classroom were smooth with nails cleanly cut. Hands raised to answer the teacher's question. Hands engaged in the age-old art of spit-ball forming. Hands writing on the blackboard. They all seemed so new, so unused, so beautiful.

May hid her hands. In kindergarten she hid them under the table. In first grade she hid them under the table. In second grade, third grade, and even fourth grade, she hid her hands in this way. Winters were always easier, thanks to Grandma's handmade mittens. Colorful and bold, decorated with baby ducks and later, with purple and blue stripes, the mittens meant May felt no shame walking to school carrying books and lunch for herself and her sister.

Exclamations like, "Oh, how beautiful," and "I wish my grandma would make some mittens with stripes," stirred up hope inside May and for a brief moment she would tell herself she was one of them, for they would forget her hands and remember instead her beautiful mittens.

Back in the classroom, May would catch someone looking in her direction and shove her hands back under the desk. She never raised her hand, never applauded with excitement. She wrote in hurried strokes of the pencil so as not to have her hands in full view for very long.

One day she was walking through the school hallway, with her hands shoved into her pants pockets. In the hallway that day, she saw a poster for an art class. It was a special art class, it was going to be taught by her favorite teacher, and each student was going to be able to learn to draw and paint. She signed her name on the poster and all the way home, she thought about the kind of art project she might make. Her mom worked all night long while she watched her younger sister, and she thought maybe Mom would like a pretty picture to look at when she got home from work. She also thought about how tired Mom was during the day, trying to sleep while the rest of the world was awake, and May thought she might make a "Do-not-disturb!" sign for the front door. And then she remembered her beautiful mittens, and thought she might draw a pattern to send to Grandma so Grandma could make new mittens, even some for her sister.

As soon as May got home, she sat her sister, Kate, at the kitchen table for a snack. As she did the breakfast dishes and tried to keep Kate quiet so they would not wake up Mom, May thought of all the wonderful art projects she could try. May was so busy planning her project, she forgot about her hands. She finished the dishes, got out the mop to clean up the milk that didn't quite make it to Kate's mouth, and chopped potatoes for dinner. Mom was up by now, and was rushing out the door to get to work. Mom kissed May on the head, told the girls she loved them so-o-o-o much, and went off to work.

May helped Kate with her bath, tucked her into bed, made up Mom's bed, and vacuumed the front room. After doing her homework, May went to bed and dreamt of being a famous artist. Everyone in town marveled at her beautiful paintings, she won awards from her school, and even got to give a speech in front of the governor.

When May woke up, she jumped out of bed, excited about the art class. As she braided Kate's hair, she saw her hands and suddenly realized she could not paint or draw without the other children seeing her hands.

She could not get Kate ready fast enough, and practically pulled her all the way to school. May ran to the hallway to cross her name off the poster. It was not there. The poster and sign-up sheet were gone. She went to class and told her teacher she needed to drop out of the art class. The teacher said she would have to go to the art class and tell the art teacher that she was no longer interested in the class.

When May went to the art class that day, she tried to get the teacher's attention, but there were so many other children in the class and such a lot of noise that May decided she would wait until after the class to talk to the art teacher.

After the teacher got the class to quiet down, she talked a little bit about drawing things, how important it was to draw what you saw, even if no one else saw the same thing. She said they would eventually draw their pets and maybe even a family member, but that their first lesson was to draw their own hand. May was stunned, and tried her very best not to cry in front of the other children. Though there were many things she wanted to draw, her hand was certainly not one of them. Still, she did her best though she was ashamed to even look at the rough redness around her nails. She had little bumps on her palms, and the lines in her hands reminded her of Grandma's hands. May finished her drawing and left as quickly as possible, even before the teacher had collected the hand pictures and told them what they would be doing the next day.

The following morning, May was determined to tell the art teacher she could not take the class anymore. When she got to art class, the teacher talked about all the wonderful hand drawings she had gathered from their desks the day before. The art teacher laughed about the hand drawing that showed pink-and purple-dotted fingernails. She laughed about the hand that had diamond rings on every finger, and four diamond rings on the thumb. Then she held up a hand drawing that was familiar to May. It showed a small hand, with fingers curled toward the palm as if holding a precious stone or delicate butterfly. May shoved her hands under the desk, and wanted to crawl under there to hide along with her hands.

The teacher said, "Of all the hand drawings I saw yesterday, this is the one I could not stop looking at. This is an interesting drawing, a beautiful drawing, for it shows a hand that is not idle. It shows a hand that has worked hard. The fingers are curved, as if to protect something fragile." She walked to May's desk, and asked May, "Could I please see your hand?" May did not want to show her hand, but being accustomed to obeying teachers, she pulled her hand out from under the desk. The teacher took May's hand into her own.

"Now," said the teacher, "as I hold in my own hand the hand from this drawing, I can see that I was not wrong. It is a hand that has caressed little kittens and held small daisies. It is a hand that has washed many dishes, folded laundry, given baths, and combed hair. Yes, this is a very interesting hand. It is a beautiful hand."

With that, the teacher went back and started talking about that afternoon's drawing assignment.

After class, May ran all the way home, dragging Kate part of the way, and carrying her the rest of the way. She put the drawing on Mom's bed, and with her rough, red hands, she washed the dishes, fixed dinner, bathed Kate, and finished her homework. As she lay down in bed, she noticed that the glow from the moon was shining on her hands. They look different tonight.

May thought of the many dishes and counters she washed when Mom was sleeping. She thought of the times she had bathed her sister and cleaned up the house when Mom was at work. She thought about the way her palm fit over Kate's cheek, and how wonderful her sister's skin felt to her hand. She remembered the tender kisses Mommy gave her hands when she came home from work in the dark hours of the early morning. She would hear her mommy say, "Thank you, May, for all your help. I could not do this without you."

Just as the little girl with the red, rough hands was starting to nod off, she looked one more time at her hands. And she smiled, for they really were most interesting hands.

MEDITATION - Rev. Safford (text not available)

INTRODUCTION TO THE OFFERING - Jillian Lampert

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

Peace, Be Still (Stephen Iverson) Carol Caouette, piano

READING

Our reading this morning comes from Finding Beauty in a Broken World - By TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS

'Eloquence is spoken through the labor of hands, anonymous hands of forgotten centuries. With eyes looking up, artisans rolled gold tesserae between their fingers in thought, as they searched for the precise placement in domes and apses where light could converse with glass. Jeweled ceilings become lavish tales. I want to understand these stories told through fragments. I am an apprentice in a mosaic workshop. ...

A mosaic is a conversation between what is broken.

A mosaic is a conversation that takes place on surfaces.

A mosaic is a conversation with light, with color, with form.

A mosaic is a conversation with time. ...

Back at the workshop, I sit down and finish the upper right hand corner of the lilies, cutting tesserae in the shapes of triangles... My eye is more acute in recognizing patterns that serve the whole. I am learning to watch and study.

I am also learning to trust the motion that comes through color and interstices, not in the controlled, static placement of each cube but in the joy of odd arrangements and unpredictable moves of choice.

I believe in the beauty of all things common. Lilies. Stone. Cut Glass. I believe in the beauty of all things broken. ...

'[After the final steps] We bring our mosaics back to our individual work spaces and begin the laborious process of cleaning each tesserae like a dentist cleans teeth. ... Our dream of perfection interrupted by [our teacher] Luciana's gruff voice, "Enough; now it is time to see the beauty, the imperfect beauty."

I came to this workshop in Ravenna because of the word mosaic, unaware of the landscape I was entering. I came to the mosaic workshop in Ravenna to learn a new language with my hands.

People talk about medium. What is your medium? My medium as a writer has been dirt, clay, sand - what I could touch, hold, stand on and stand for - Earth. My medium has been Earth. Earth in correspondence with my mind.

Here in the village of Ravenna, a continent away from where I live, I am indeed learning a new language, but it is very different from the one I imagined.

I now look to my hands.

"Mosaic is a way to organize your life." Luciana gives us her last instructions. "Making mosaics is a way of thinking about the world." [Her] final words: "Mosaics are created out of community."

SONG Keep Breathing written by Ingrid Michaelson, played and sung by Carol Caouette and Craig Hansen

The storm is coming but I don't mind
People are dying, I close my blinds
All that I know is I'm breathing now
I want to change the world, and instead I sleep
I want to believe in more than you and me
But all that I know is I'm breathing
All I can do is keep breathing
All we can do is keep breathing
Now, now
Now, now, now
All that I know is I'm breathing
All I can do is keep breathing
All we can do is keep breathing
keep breathing
Now

SERMON Shards of Light Rev. Sara Goodman

All I can do is keep breathing. All we can do is keep breathing. This has been an incredibly hard year. Some days all we can do is keep breathing. Some days we think deep thoughts while we stare at a wall, and some days we stare at a wall without a thought in our head, just breathing.

Week after week, when I lead our meditation time, I ask you to breathe with me, because often we need to be reminded that we're still breathing. Sometimes in meetings and other gatherings, I'll ask you to take a breath with me, because I know that I'm breathing too shallowly and need to take a deep breath to center myself, which means you could probably use one too.

So right now, let's take a deep breath.

It's been a rough year, and there is more to come before our lives find a new rhythm. Before we can find a new sense of wholeness, we are here breaking open.

Can only things that have never been broken be whole? This month we are talking about Wholeness the practice of Breaking Open, which on first glance might be a play in opposites, but with consideration are tightly interwoven. Images flood my mind when I think about wholeness and brokenness.

I can imagine them as siblings holding hands spinning in a circle, holding each other balanced as they spin faster and faster before letting go and falling down. That moment, though, where they feel their pull in opposite directions, tightening their grip on each other, feeling that center pivot point unite them, that is the important moment.

To me, that's Wholeness and Breaking Open. Point, counterpoint, holding each other up, pulling each other into faster motion.

Yes, Breaking Open is sometimes painful and traumatic and just really hard. And in some ways wholeness can be hard and painful too, when it's an appearance of wholeness that wasn't really whole inside.

Wholeness is supposed to be a goal, right? But that feeling of completion that's implied with the word whole is just an unachievable goal post.

Wholeness, as in 'never broken' is not possible in living a life. Wholeness, as in 'intact' 'no pieces missing', isn't a thing for a community either. If by wholeness you mean perfection, you and I aren't talking about the same thing.

Because when I say wholeness, I mean broken open, because when I say broken open, I mean wholeness. The wholeness I'm talking about is a feeling of centeredness in our off-centeredness. The wholeness that I'm talking about is a larger wholeness than we've known previously – like a seed breaking open to become a plant, a tree, to become something it never imagined becoming.

What can we become when we allow ourselves to break open, heal from that breaking, and grow beyond into something more?

I, of course, am using this metaphor on several levels. As individuals, I believe that we all have the capacity to grow ourselves into who we are called to be. That's why I am here, doing this work in this congregation, because you want to grow your souls. And you want to do it as part of a community.

But I am also here in this congregation because you want to serve the world. And you intimately see the importance of both. Because you know, many of you from personal experience, how hard it is to change the world for the better when it is constantly changing. How hard it is to change the world for the better when the injustice we see happening in our culture, in the wider world haven't actually shifted that much in our lifetimes, in our parent's lifetimes. When the conflicts are the same ancient conflicts we've been rehashing for generation upon generation upon generation.

Our democracy is threatened here in the United States, Fascism is on the rise globally, a global pandemic is raging, barely in check in many places and raging wildly out of control in others, with powerhouse dominant governments hoarding vaccines for their own countries, and only as an afterthought sharing the excess.

Our wholeness is broken, globally. Our planet's temperature is rising, our climate is changing, and we are all going to find out what it really means to be part of an interdependent web of existence soon.

And here we are on a precipice as a congregation, a big ending is coming our way as we say goodbye to Victoria and Thaxter, who have helped to shape this church into who we are today. And maybe it feels like breaking. Maybe it feels like the ending, but as every writer knows, the end is only the beginning of the next story.

Just when we think a thing is irreparably broken, it can find a new life as something different, part of a greater whole.

Victoria shared with us earlier in the reading from Terry Tempest Williams, thoughts about the art of mosaic. Mosaic is an art form that takes broken pieces of glass or tile or ceramic and re-configures them into something new.

Mosaic artist Marco de Luca shared these thoughts with Williams while she was in Ravenna: "Mosaic became the way I perceived the world: Break it up and re-create a unity. Part of the nature of [humanity] is to recompose a unity that has been broken. In mosaic, I re-create an order out of shards."

Re-create an order out of shards. Shards of varieties of textures and colors, shards that reflect the light differently, and must be chosen to compliment the exact location it will be placed.

Things get broken, people get broken, feelings get broken, and then we put them back together. If we do it with intention, noticing how each shard of light interacts, we can create something with great depth and motion, something of great beauty and imperfection.

Williams writes: "Eloquence is spoken through the labor of hands, anonymous hands of forgotten centuries. With eyes looking up, artisans rolled gold tesserae between their fingers in thought, as they searched for the precise placement in domes and apses where light could converse with glass. Jeweled ceilings become lavish tales. I want to understand these stories told through fragments..."

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A mosaic of community is created over time and shifts as new people come and as others fall away. A mosaic of this community holds all the pieces of folks who brought this congregation from a tiny fellowship in folks' homes to where we are today, with a gorgeous building and around a thousand folks who call this community home. So many hands created this – so many craftspeople took the time to mull over where exactly to place a single piece of textured glass, golden or taupe, to make the image vibrant, to shine the vision of the congregation into the future.

I, like Williams “believe in the beauty of all things common. Lillies. Stone. Cut Glass. I believe in the beauty of all things broken.” I believe, in the beauty of vulnerability and strength – the ways they intermingle – brokenness and wholeness both in their measure.

I believe that there is so much beauty in imperfection. Our brokenness makes us real – the spots where our fur has rubbed off, to speak of a favorite children’s book The Velveteen Rabbit, the spots where our fur’s been loved off are the spots that make us real.

I imagine a ceiling I saw when I was in Italy myself back in the days we could travel. I imagine this ceiling in a cathedral, lined with hundreds of thousands of tiny cubes of broken glass, glittering and telling a story. And I think of a different ceiling I saw in Italy, the inside of an historic senate room, adorned with acres of solid gold. That told a different kind of story. In that room, I looked up and thought, “how many people would this ceiling feed if they sold the gold?” How could this seat of government work under this ceiling day after day, and not feel the weight of human suffering that could have been solved, but instead went into a solid gold ceiling. The contrasts to me were here: the gold was shaped into ‘perfect’ shapes from a valuable commodity, while the mosaics were made up of broken pieces of a fairly low value commodity. The beauty of the mosaic is in the ways that they fit together – the broken pieces compliment and shape each other, and are only beautiful when they are together.

The problem with using the metaphor of a mosaic is that at the end of the process there is a final product of a mosaic – a final done piece. But in the mosaic of community, we are always building, breaking things open again, coming back together. That’s the work, that’s why we’re here. And that’s the beauty of it. We are never done making the mosaic. It is an ever evolving ever expanding artwork of broken pieces, shards that reflect the light of our community out into the world.

Keep shining that light, keep breathing, and join me in singing our closing hymn number 1008 When Our Heart is in a Holy Place.

HYMN - When Our Heart is In a Holy Place

CLOSING WORDS - from James Vila Blake, (in unison) Jillian Lampert

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 - Rev. Safford

Farewell friends, thank you so much for joining us today. Be sure to watch the eNews this week: you can sign up for spring and summer Courtyard Gatherings, in-person, here at church! These gatherings will feature our Flower Communion and a ritual walk through the sanctuary. You don’t want to miss it. Those gatherings will be starting later this month, and other in-person gatherings are coming soon.

In the meantime, join our ministry staff for a short newcomer gathering right now, and in a few minutes, at 11:15, join us for conversation and connection in Cyber Social Hour! The links are in the chat.

We are sending you love from all of us, at all of our locations. Be well, friends.

POSTLUDE Japanese Bowl (Peter Mayer)

I'm like one of those Japanese bowls

That were made long ago

I have some cracks in me
They have been filled with gold
That's what they used back then^[OBJ]
When they had a bowl to mend
It did not hide the cracks
It made them shine instead
So now every old scar shows
From every time I broke
And anyone's eyes can see
I'm not what I used to be
But in a collector's mind
All of these jagged lines
Make me more beautiful
And worth a higher price
I'm like one of those Japanese bowls
I was made long ago
I have some cracks you can see
See how they shine of gold.