

ORDER OF SERVICE

APRIL 3, 2022

CHIME

WELCOME

Ted Barnes

PRELUDE

"Schneeglöckchen"

Polly Oliver, piano

Peter I. Tchaikowsky ("April Snowbells" from "The Seasons", Opus 37)

OPENING WORDS

Rev. Dr. Stephanie May

Welcome, I am the Rev. Dr. Stephanie May (she/her)

And I am so glad to be back with you today,

More rested and "awake"—to borrow from our April theme.

Our opening words from poet and author John O'Donohue

also speak to this theme. O'Donohue writes:

We live between the act of awakening

and the act of surrender.

Each morning we awaken to the light

and the invitation to a new day in the world of time;

each night we surrender to the dark

to be taken to play in the world of dreams

where time is no more.

At birth we were awakened

and emerged to become visible in the world.

At death we will surrender again

to the dark to become invisible.

Awakening and surrender:

they frame each day and each life;

between them the journey

where anything can happen,

the beauty and the frailty.

May we be awake this hour

As we seek to relish this precious *time*

Of here and now

As we breathe and rest,

Sing and share.

[pause]

To bring more light to our day,

I invite the Larson family to come and light our chalice,

Symbol of our shared tradition, Unitarian Universalism,

And to lead us in our covenant—
The promises we make to each other
For how to be together.

CHALICE LIGHTING & COVENANT

Larson Family

*With open minds and loving hearts, we gather to search for meaning,
to care for one another, and to work together for a better world.*

HYMN #12

"O Life That Maketh All Things New"

Lucy Pease, hymn leader

TIME FOR ALL AGES

"Ramadan Moon"

Kate Holland

By Na'ima B Robert; Ill. by Shirin Adl; Pub. Frances Lincoln Limited

Children leave for SEEK programming

*"Go now in peace. Go no in peace. May the love of all surround you,
everywhere, everywhere you may go."*

CANDLE FOR DAY OF SILENCE

Laurel Whitehouse

TIME OF PRAYER AND MEDITATION

PRAYER

Alyssa Lee

MOMENT OF STILLNESS

JOYS AND SORROWS

Roger Horine

STEWARDSHIP TESTIMONIAL

Jan Miner

OFFERING

Alyssa Lee

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OFFERTORY

"Adagio Cantabile"

Polly Oliver, piano

Ludwig Van Beethoven

READING

"This is What Was Bequeathed to Us"

*Recorded

Gregory Orr

SERMON

"Sing Me Awake"

Rev. Dr. May

More than once these past couple years,

I've just wanted to scream!

Which is to say that I've felt a lot of anger
throughout the pandemic.

But why *anger*?

After a lot of reflection,
I have come to understand:
the anger is a mask for my grief.

We have all lost much these past years—
individually and together.

I cancelled a dream trip with my mom to Paris
in April 2020 just as some of you
also cancelled trips near and far.

Some of you lost the opportunity
for high school and college graduations with family—
or simply visiting your college kids
at a place farther away than down the hall.

Some of you lost many, many months
before meeting new grandchildren
as precious moments of childhood passed.

Parents lost so much sleep, so many dreams
for how they imagined parenting their kids.
Rather, you spent hours figuring out Zoom school
and then the ever-shifting protocols
of testing and masking.

And, finally, some of you have lost
your jobs, your marriages, and,
yes, even family and friends.

As a community, we have lost the opportunity
to offer a hug or quiet word in Coffee Hour
to share the burden of our losses.
With breakout rooms, MidWeek Check-in,
phone calls, and notes,
we have tried to stay connected,
tried to share the heartaches and challenges
of these years.

But the need for distance segregated us,
undermining the very essence of what defines us:
congregating.

I am grateful for the gifts of technology
that offered a modicum of relief
from the distance and the isolation.

And yet, it isn't the same, is it?!
We miss the small conversations,
the smiles passing in the hall,
the serendipitous connections
that become new friendships,
programs, or possibilities.
We miss the sense of "buzz"
that emerges on a Sunday morning before the service begins,
that electric current that links us
one to another into a body
larger than ourselves.

Today, the loss I place on this altar of grief
is the "buzz" of the in-person congregation
we were in March 2020.
We had plans—
plans like MetroWest Climate Solutions
hosting a large gathering to hear Senator Mike Barrett
where we would hand out these cards
describing the group and listing our website.
Cards that have remained in a box on a shelf in my office.
We will not ever know what might have become
of the buzzing congregation of March 2020.
History intervened and turned our course.

My time away these past two weeks
became a meditation on history.
I visited varied historical sites:
the Reconstruction Era National Park
in Beaufort, SC where formerly enslaved persons
first tasted freedom, waged labor, and education;
Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia
where Lee surrendered his Confederate troops to Grant;
and the Woolworth Counter in Greensboro, North Carolina
where students—teenagers—chose
to defy the degradation of Jim Crow
by taking a seat and asking for a cup of coffee.

Visiting these historical sites
while also reading about the war in Ukraine,

I had a sense of History with a capital "H."
There are times when the moment
and the movement of events around us
is too large to ignore or to stop.
We must surrender to History.
Ignoring events is simply not possible
amidst the widespread impact.
Our only choice becomes how to respond
to the circumstances of the moment.

The pandemic has been a moment of global history.
We have all had to surrender,
to lose control to its relentless impact upon us.
We have all had to grieve losses
of people, of freedoms, of a future
that will never be.
We could not simply hit pause
and hold our breath for a month, maybe two.
We had to accept the changes.
We had to let go.

The poet Gregory Orr counsels:

*This is what was bequeathed us:
This earth the beloved left
And, leaving,
Left to us.*

*No other world
But this one:
Willows and the river
And the factory
With its black smokestacks.*

This, this is the world bequeathed to us.
The one without our beloved.
The one with grief and loss.
As well as the one with natural beauty
beneath a sky choked by black smoke.

But we don't want to surrender!

We like to be the people who *do something*.
We are the religion of *deeds not creeds*.
We are the ones who can *make a difference*.
Until we can't.
At least, not really.
Not in a way that simply
makes the problem go away.
Sometimes we cannot "fix" the problem,
we can only surrender to the world
bequeathed to us in this moment of history.

We did not choose this moment,
nor want these events,
nor may we be happy about it.
Not the losses of experiences,
of gatherings, of people.
Not the forced adaptation to Zoom
and multiplatform worship.
Not the ever-changing advice
about masking, vaccinations, and
what constitutes "safe" for individuals and for groups.
But this is the world bequeathed to us.
We have no choice but how to respond
within the context we inherit.

We are here on *this* shore
littered with the refuse of our lost hopes,
our broken dreams for what our life
should have been like in 2020, '21, '22.
Let us name where we are and
acknowledge what we have indeed lost.
Let us hear the sorrow in our own heart
and the grief in another's.
And let us have compassion for one another.

We have all been changed
by what was bequeathed us by
this moment, this history, this loss.
And, as the poet Orr counsels, there is:

*No meaning but what we find here.
No purpose but what we make.*

*That, and the beloved's clear instructions:
Turn me into song; sing me awake.*

Having accepted what shore we now live upon.
Having acknowledged the losses and our grief.
What meaning and purpose might we now make?
What song might we now sing?
What buzz might we reignite
within this congregation?

This may not be where we wanted to be.
And we may not be happy about it.
But this is where we are.
And there is still so much beauty to be seen.
The willow tree. The river.
The daffodils emerging.
The laughter of children.
The wonder of life and love.

Yes, there are still the black smokestacks
and the rise of "Don't Say Gay" legislation
and a whole litany of things that *should* be different.
But let us not only scream and weep.
Let us also remember to sing.
Let us pay attention as spring arrives.
Let us dare to reconnect with people
in person here and/or other places
that matter to us.
Let us still live, even here,
on this shore where we never wanted to be.

May it be so.
Amen.

RITUAL OF LEAVING

"Loosen Loosen"
Aly Halpert

Rev. Dr. May

- This is a time name our losses, part of cycle of grief
- Please place an object or write down on index cards your loss(es)
- I'll wait a moment, then invite you to Come forward to place your objects/cards
- END: thank you...

Having accepted what shore we now live upon.

Having acknowledged the losses and our grief.

What meaning and purpose might we now make?

What song might we now sing?

Let us not only scream and weep.

Let us also sing.

Let us dare to reconnect with people

in places that matter to us.

Let us still live, even here,

on this shore where we never wanted to be.

HYMN #354

"We Laugh, We Cry"

Lucy Pease, hymn leader

(On the last verse, please turn toward rear doors for the benediction)

BENEDICTION

Rev. Dr. May

MUSICAL RESPONSE

"Loosen Loosen" (reprise)

Polly Oliver, piano



*Online or Recorded

Recording and Facebook Live End

SPOKEN JOYS & SORROW

COMMUNITY TIME: In-Person: Join us either in the Commons (masks required) or by the Sheds (masks optional).

Online Chat Rooms ("Vestry", "Commons"): Open Chats