

Service from UU Montclair
January 31, 2021
“Transcendent”

Introduction to Hymn - Markus

Welcome! My name is Markus Grae-Hauck, I am the Director of Music Ministries here at our congregation. My pronouns are he, him, and his. We are about to sing our gathering hymn, joining virtually, together in song. And in a moment we will join together for our chalice lighting, where we will invite everyone to light your own flame, at home. To prepare for this, perhaps you will want to find a chalice or a candle, as we sing. Our hymn leaders are Ginny and Steve Crooks.

Wake, Now My Senses (v. 1,3,4), #298
We'll Build a Land, #121

Welcome and Chalice Lighting - Dan Silver

Whoever you are, wherever you come from, whatever age, identity, history, ability, gender, or sexual orientation, you are welcome to bring your full self here.

I am Dan Silver. My pronouns are he, him, and his.

Grounded in faith, we come together to nurture the soul, inspire hope, and bring into being a more just and loving world.

Today's service titled Transcendent will ask you to consider who you are and who the world asks you to be. How do you rise above those expectations and live into who you are?

If you have school aged children, please register for our innovative Children's Religious Education program.

And we wanted to let you know that this weekend we are hosting a Justice Training that began on Saturday with over fifty of our members enrolled! How wonderful.

If you are joining us at 10am, please continue with us for a virtual "Connection Cafe" beginning at 11am. Check your email and Realm announcements for the Zoom link.

It's time to light our chalice, a beacon to guide us through these times together. Perhaps you have a chalice or candle at home... anything that you can illumine.

Let's light our collective chalices as we share our chalice lighting affirmation.

Invocation (RA) and Remembrance Info -

Our Invocation comes from the Reverend David Breeden who in this poem affirms that -- "Yes, There's no Binary."

[reading]

Called, now, by this invocation into worship, we turn to seek a soft meditation, a deep reflection, an ardent prayer. ...Each as we are called, yet, mystically, all together.

And we enter into this space by hearing the lamentations, the requests, and the remembrances of our community -
Let us hear one another to heal one another.

Candle Lighting -

We light this candle for Susan and Joe Spanier, who have been diagnosed with Covid-19. We hold this dear couple in our hearts and our prayers for healing.

Judie Rinearson and Nick Lewis would like to light three candles for three close friends who are suffering losses during these difficult times.

- For Kevin Knicely, whose mother died last week after a long battle with dementia.
 - For Lynet* (Linnay) Gaia, whose husband died suddenly on Sunday night from chronic health conditions, complicated by Covid.
 - For Pam Braye, whose breast cancer chemo treatments continue in North Carolina, where she is also trying to care for her elderly parents.
- Please keep these wonderful people in your healing thoughts and prayers.

We light this candle for Rev. Scott who has received a six month post-treatment blood test that declares he is, for now, wholly cancer-free!

Anne Sailer lights a candle in celebration of her mom Patricia Patrick's birthday on January 27th -- may her playful approach to life and living inspire us all.

We light this candle in celebration of the overturning of the ban on Transgender individuals serving in the military.

We light this final candle for the joys and sorrows that have not been spoken aloud. In the silence that follows, you are encouraged to speak the names of those you are holding in your prayers or meditations, or to write them into the chat. May we hold this silence as this silence holds us.

May our listening bring forth acts of love.

Prayer - Rev. Scott

Spirit of Life, known in so many ways ~
Gracious Love ever unfolding, known fully by no single name
Time and again we come, to remind ourselves to pause;
to reflect; to give thanks;
to ponder the mysteries of the ages,
the mystery of life itself,
confronting the question, "how should we live our lives?"

Time and again we gather to remind ourselves of the brilliance of life, and to honestly share its toils and terrors.

Time and again we congregate, seeking guidance, wisdom, perspective from one another, and the holy;

Time and again we gather,
inviting fellow seekers to walk with us.

Time and again we come, hoping to be reminded of that which transcends us, that which reminds us we are part and parcel of something much larger than our solitary selves -

reminded that something transcendent is crucial to who we are - reminded that something transcendent is what brings us life in the first place.

Time and again we are reminded of the weighty burdens the world places upon us - and of baggage we place unduly upon ourselves; we gather seeking ways to transcend those personal dungeons

Time and again we appear, hoping our 'meagre human strides' will be enough to transcend the misery and sorrow we see all around us, we see within us ...

Time and again we show up - our senses awakened, hoping that we can do what the spirit says, and feed our souls with something beyond the drudgery of chores, tasks and deadlines.

Time and again we rise to remind ourselves what is transient, what is permanent. ~
And when we rise, when we face ourselves and the holy as we understand it with courage and humility, we hope our prayers for transcendence, comfort and perspective will be answered, a way shown before us, and some companions in covenant love will accompany us on our journey - a journey to discover, celebrate and share our true, best self - a self sparkled with beauty, drenched with compassion, eager to praise, ready to serve.

In the name of all that each of us deems holy within, we pray

Amen

Prayer Response: There Is More Love Somewhere

Offering - MESH VIDEO

Reading - Dan Silver

As the Spirit Moves

Wading through the obligatory mire,
the sun dimmed by grey-clouded skies,
each lie and distraction a weighty burden
of our meagre human strides,
to seek a higher path, seek a nurturing light,
find purchase upon an earthen trail,
not immersed in the sludge of rotting lies.

Earthly pursuits give us a reason,
aspirations each painted season of our lives,
yet the only elixir to quench our thirst
is far beyond our purposeful stride,
it is the call of spirit, higher thoughts
beyond the ego and physical divide,
where transcendent ideas prevail.

At some point we realize,
we cannot fill that dark hollow within
as we pursue wealth, status and pride,
it is neither love nor family that saves us,
but knowing the self, accepting our path
that brings completeness to our lives,
as the spirit moves so does all else.

**Anthem: This is Me (from the movie “The Greatest Showman”) - Benj Pasek,
Justin Paul**

**Sung by Kieran Wells, Kate Loysen Turek, Laura Thomas, Patrick Preblich, Rae
Dumont, Becca Nast, Beatrice Grae-Hauck, Jason Brome, Michael Hetrick, Mary
Moriarty, Jennifer Rittner, Kate Conroy, Laurice Grae-Hauck**

Homily

There are many ways of being in the world. How have you moved beyond the norms of what people have decided you should be?

When the sharpest words wanna cut me down
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown 'em out
I am brave, I am bruised
I am who I'm meant to be, this is me. Yes, This. Is. Me.

Have you ever been in a situation where everyone believes that you act or think a certain way and you just don't? The way that they see you is just not you. I have, and when that happens I always wonder how that occurs.

Like, what cues am I sending to people to have them so clearly not see me. I think about how we mask ourselves, or send our representatives when we first meet people and keep up the show for a very long time until we truly get to know them. I wonder if that is how it happens.

Sometimes, I wonder if it is just related to what we think they can see on the outside. Like our race, gender, body type. If it is just the stereotype of what people expect to see veiling their eyes.

I've asked myself how often I have seen with my own lens, how often I have stereotyped people and missed the person altogether. I wonder what opportunities of connection, what opportunities of learning I have missed in looking but not seeing.

This superficial way of interacting, the way we look but do not see, is in part due to predictive processing theory. In this theory it is thought that people use what is called "the predictive brain" to make sense of the world. The predictive brain is wired to see patterns and to interpret how things are likely to be. In this processing we subconsciously use stereotypes to help with trying to sort through the information that we receive. Imagine how hard it is to introduce a new way of thinking to other people when this part of the brain is running the show.

The struggle often reminds me of the struggles our transcendentalist ancestors had when describing how they saw the world versus how many other people saw it.

The Transcendentalists, like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Emily Dickinson, Theodore Parker, Louisa May Alcott, and Walt Whitman, were often misunderstood. Some of this feels inaccurate to me. You are welcome to use this: Transcendentalism was a movement of thought and faith that grew out of the enlightenment sensibilities and the spiritual yearnings of many of our faith ancestors. Birthed both within and on the margins of the Unitarian movement in the eighteen hundreds, transcendentalism stretched the bounds of what it meant to be religious. Rather than situating the faithful path as an orientation to holy scripture, they saw scripture everywhere - in nature, in passionate conversation, in scientific deliberation, and in the unique and beautiful truth of every person. This transcendentalism challenged the rationalism firmly embraced by the Unitarian fold. At times this led stricter Unitarians to laugh (and worse) at their transcendental kin. Still, as they were laughing, they were learning (often against their own wills) that truth can't be contained in one holy book - that each of us is a holy book unto ourselves - and that searching for the truth in another soul yields something worthy of the label - a religious experience. I know that the rational Unitarians were learning this because if you trace the history of our faith, you see a continuous meeting and merging of rational and spiritual or transcendental ideas. What we are today is a product of both.

We can see this today in the struggles that we see in our congregations between those who believe in nature, believe in something bigger like God, and believe that our

intuition can be a guide for our actions. We can see this today in the way that we worship.

We can see it in the expectations of those who prefer that worship be stoic and still, and those who prefer worship to be embodied and full of emotion.

I definitely have experienced this tension in our faith as a minister who preaches in other congregations. And this tension is complicated by the way that my identity is apprehended by some of our congregations. As I shared earlier, when we see one another, sometimes we don't see one another's full truth - just the stereotypical surface."

Often other congregations expect me to use God language, sing negro spirituals, and enjoy stomping and clapping. Although I prefer this style of worship sometimes, it excludes me in their minds from the ministers that are seen as intellectuals and reserved. I am sure that I am not the only one who experiences this. Fem ministers are often expected to lead with pastoral calm and never voice righteous anger. Masculine ministers are expected to be consistently sturdy and stoic, and never volunteer their true vulnerability. And what is true for ministers is also true for members. What have people projected on you in our congregations that just isn't true? How do you allow yourself to say, "I'm not scared to be seen. I make no apologies, this is me."

African-American Abolitionist and Transcendentalist William C. Nell found his voice when he introduced his belief in transcendentalism. He used his platform to promote the idea that transcendentalism was inherently linked to the cause of abolition. He was a founding member of the New England Freedom association, a Black Organization that assisted fugitive slaves to gain freedom. He was also the first African-American to hold a federal position as clerk in the U.S. Postal Department. Nell's concept of black elevation (a way in which black intellectuals sought to bring attention to the advancement that AA could receive if given access to adequate education and opportunities for economic improvement) was expressed not only politically but also through his transcendental lens. Nell's fellowship Ralph Waldo Emerson is reported to have been influential in helping him embrace becoming more political in his personal life. I wonder what would happen if we all acted as Nell did so long ago?

What would happen if we did what we felt called to do? If we were who we called to be? I wonder what parts of our familial, community, congregational life would be impacted by our courage to be exactly who we are.

I feel certain that Nell didn't feel comfortable being someone who was called to create a bridge for black abolitionists and transcendentalists to cross. I know that like Nell we have built bridges that seem tenuous at best when we are living into our true selves. It is often in that place of being fully authentic and living in our truth that we also find a strength that we were unaware that we even had. It is in these times that we are confronted by our own divinity.

So, "When the sharpest words wanna cut me down
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown 'em out," and I invite you to do the same. Take that risk, do that thing that makes your heart pound and your hands sweat. That thing

that wakes you up at night and creeps into the edges of your waking moments. Do the thing that calls you to act, to live into your values. Do the thing that you see your full self when you think about doing it. You can do it, be brave though you are bruised and do it. Be who you are meant to be.
Ashe, Amen, and Blessed Be.

Will you reflect with me: How will you shine the fullness of your true self and work to see the true selves of others?

When the Spirit Says Do - Hymn #1024

Benediction

Go inward to your core to see the fullness of you.
Go forth into the world and see the fullness of people.
For we are all on this journey trying to be the who that we are meant to be. Amen

Chalice Extinguishing Video

Song: "Our Worship Has Ended, Let our Service Begin"

Sign-Off - Rev. Scott and Rev. Anya

Join us right after this for Connection Cafe
...Have you been to Connection Cafe yet?
No? ... Perhaps today is the day!
And... Until we meet again,
Virtually or otherwise,
You are in our hearts.