

5/17/2020 Church Service

Prelude: - *Somewhere* arr. Close - J Gawf

Bell Sound – Rev. Michelle

Welcome - Michelle

Opening Words: *Suspended Between* by Linda Barnes – Catherine Plumlee

Chalice Lighting: - Catherine

Music: *We Are Gathered* arr. Udis-Kessler – William Miller

Story: *The Desert and the Stream*, a Sufi story by Patricia E. De Jong - Michelle

Musical Meditation: #1011 *Return Again*

Reading: *The Magdalene’s Blessing* by Jan Richardson - Michelle

Music: #1040 *Hush* – William Miller

Reflection: - Michelle

Music: #1007 *There’s A River Flowin’ in My Soul* – Margaret Johnston

Reading: *For a New Beginning* by John O’Donohue - Michelle

Closing Words: *An Ending or a Prelude to More Glorious Beginnings?* by Michael A Schuler – Catherine

Extinguishing the Chalice

Announcements – Michelle

TECH: HIT RECORD!

Prelude: *Somewhere* arr. Close - J Gawf

IMAGE: SINGING BOWL

Bell Sound - Michelle

Welcome - Michelle

Opening Words: *Suspended Between* by Linda Barnes – Catherine Plumlee

Suspended between all that was and all that might be,
we struggle to find this very moment—to live this very moment.

Let us sit together for a moment, and savor this moment.
Let us relish this between time where past meets future,
Let us harbor a faith that reminds us that right now, right here, is enough.

IMAGE: Lit Chalice

Chalice Lighting: by Florence Caplow - Catherine

We kindle this flame,
Honoring the doorways in our souls:
The windows through which we gaze at one another
The balconies where we catch glimpses of sky
The thresholds we stand on this morning
Wondering, hoping, fearing, dreaming.

IMAGE: Music with Lyrics

Music: *We Are Gathered* arr. Udis-Kessler – William Miller

Story: *The Desert and the Stream*, a Sufi story by Patricia E. De Jong – Michelle

There is a little Sufi story about a stream of water working itself across the country, experiencing little difficulty. It ran around the rocks and through the mountains. Then it arrived at the desert. Just as it had crossed every other barrier, the stream tried to cross this one, but it found that as fast as it ran into the sand its waters disappeared. After many attempts, it became very discouraged.

Then a voice came. “If you stay the way you are you cannot cross the sands; you cannot become more than a quagmire. To go further, you will have to lose yourself.”

“But if I lose myself, I will never know what I’m supposed to be.”

“On the contrary,” said the voice. “If you lose yourself you will become more than you ever dreamed you could be.”

So the stream surrendered to the dying sun. And the clouds into which it was formed were carried by the raging wind for many miles. Once it crossed the desert, the stream poured down from the skies, fresh and clean and full of the energy that comes from storms.

If you lose yourself, you will become more than you ever dreamed you could be.

IMAGE: Lyrics

Musical Meditation: #1011 *Return Again*

Reading: *The Magdalene’s Blessing* by Jan Richardson – Michelle

You hardly imagined
standing here,
everything you ever loved
suddenly returned to you,
looking you in the eye
and calling your name.

And now
you do not know
how to abide this ache
in the center
of your chest,
where a door
slams shut
and swings open
at the same time,
turning on the hinge
of your aching
and hopeful heart.

I tell you,
this is not a banishment
from the garden.

This is an invitation,
a choice,
a threshold,
a gate.

This is your life
calling to you
from a place
you could never
have dreamed,
but now that you
have glimpsed its edge,
you cannot imagine
choosing any other way.

So let the tears come
as anointing,
as consecration,
and then
let them go.

Let this blessing
gather itself around you.

Let it give you
what you will need
for this journey.

You will not remember
the words—
they do not matter.

All you need to remember
is how it sounded
when you stood
in the place of death
and heard the living
call your name.

Music: #1040 *Hush* – William Miller

UPCOMING IMAGE: porch with rocking chair during reflection

Reflection: *On Thresholds* – Michelle

Thresholds. Those magical moments when life can be divided into before and after. A couple is married. A child is born. A minister is ordained. An elder dies. A class graduates. A job is lost, or a new job gained. A therapeutic breakthrough dawns. Our human lives are so often seen as a journey; or described as a series of thresholds we pass through. Before we were married. After she was born. Before he died. After she graduated. Often our status changes: single or married, lay or ordained, student or professional, employed or jobless, alive or dead. These thresholds are often accompanied by ritual. Baptisms, Weddings, Graduations, Funerals, Ordinations. And, they are often narrow, in both time and space. Some are passed through in a matter of moments, others can take longer: a few hours or maybe a day. An umbilical cord is cut. A diploma is handed over and a tassel moved. A couple is pronounced married. A stole is placed on a seminarian's shoulders. A doctor notes the time of death. A husband carries his bride over the threshold of their new home. A couple jumps a broom. A woman comes home and pauses to touch a mezuzah just before she passes through her doorway. These are the thresholds that last a few moments in time or cover a few inches in space. These are the thresholds that regularly mark our life journeys; that denote times of major transition. These are the thresholds with which we are all so familiar.

This morning I would like to invite you to think of thresholds in a new way; to expand your vision of what a threshold is and can be; to widen the space and time given to the thresholds in your life; to move away from the idea of a threshold as a narrow doorway to be passed quickly through that divides life into before and after. I invite you into a time of quiet visioning. Find a comfortable place in your seat. If you'd like, you can plant your feet, or your hands, firmly on the floor, so that you might feel grounded, more connected to the earth which nourishes and

sustains you and all of life. You can gaze softly upon the image on the screen or close your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so and take a deep breath in.

Imagine yourself on a nice, wide porch. Behind you is your home. It does not have to be your actual home or the place where you live now, though it could be. Rather, this is a metaphorical journey inward; a journey of the imagination. This home is the place where you have lived, perhaps for all of your life. This home behind you is your comfortable place, your secure place; the place where you know what to expect and what is expected of you; the place where life, in all of its ups and downs, is predictable. Before you is a grand vista filled with open fields, rolling hills, scattered trees, some mountains off in the distance, a meandering river, and roads that wind their way through the fields, hills, and mountains. The porch you are on is quite wide, sturdy, comfortable. You are sitting in a rocking chair, rocking quietly, sheltered from the sun, a gentle breeze upon your face. This porch you sit upon is your threshold. It is quiet here. You are at peace. There is no rush, no pressure of time, though you are aware your past is behind you and your future is in front of you. This is your threshold. It is quiet here. You are at peace. There is no rush. You are aware that, eventually, you will get up and either return the home behind you or venture off into the world in front of you. But for now, you have all the time you need to ponder this question: what is possible?... What is possible?... (a few seconds of silence, followed by a sound from the singing bowl, end image here)

Thresholds can be narrow doorways, brief moments in time and space. But they can also be something more, something expansive, something filled with both time and space. Thresholds can be places to rest, not just pause, but places to actually rest, to sit comfortably in a rocking chair. Thresholds can be times to ponder, to consider what is possible. Thresholds can be a way of opening up both space and time to potential. Even as we go about the regular course of the days and nights of our lives, we can leave a corner of our heart ready recognize that we are about to enter a threshold.

We are, all of us together, in a threshold right now. With a pandemic swirling around us, the world is changing, has already changed, in ways we are only beginning to perceive. The writers of Soul Matters ask us to consider the question this month: How have we *already* changed? For surely we are changing and have changed. Someday, after we have passed through this crisis, after a vaccine is widely available and people have developed immunity to this virus, we will look back at this time and divide our lives into before the pandemic and after the pandemic. But it won't happen in a moment, or in a day, like 9/11 or Pearl Harbor. This threshold event is going to last awhile. What can we learn while we sit here, in this threshold? In what ways can we be intentional about how this time is changing us? What gifts does this threshold hold for us?

There is yet another threshold we are all sitting in together, right now. The interim time is coming to a close in just a few more weeks. We are saying good-bye to each other and looking forward to new and separate futures ahead of us. How will we use this time together? How will we be? How can we sit together and accept the gifts this threshold offers us, without rushing through? These are questions I invite you to ponder over these next few weeks, as I have begun to do. I can tell you a little bit about what I hope for: a good good-bye. I want to make

the time and space available for us to say good-bye to each other. We will do this by expressing our appreciations and gratitude for the past two years as well as our hopes and blessings for the future. And as we do this, we will maintain some traditions as best we can online. The first Sunday in June will still be “choir Sunday” and though it will look and feel different in some ways, it will remain a wonderful celebration of music. Your choir director, William Miller, will share some reflections that day. And the second Sunday in June will still be “flower communion” and though it, too, will look and feel different in some ways, it will remain a wonderful celebration of friendship and beauty in the natural world. You will be invited to send in photos of yourself with the flowers you would like to “bring” to flower communion. And the third Sunday in June will be our good-bye service. We will release each other from the covenant we entered into upon my arrival, celebrate our time together, and send each other on our respective ways with blessings and well-wishes. And it will all be good. Different but good.

And, of course, there are more thresholds some of us are sitting in or experiencing as individuals or within our families. Births, deaths, graduations, changes in jobs or job status, and so many more. This congregation, this community is both strong and resilient. You have the ability to face challenges and be made better by them. As we together and separately experience the thresholds of our lives, let us remember to sit in them and take the time to accept whatever gifts they have to offer us. Let us support one another in our strengths and in our vulnerabilities. Let us take the time to care for one another and let us learn and grow together. Henri-Frederic Ariel tells us: “Let mystery have its place in you... leave a little fallow corner in your heart ready for any seed the winds may bring, and... keep a place in your heart for... unexpected guests, an altar for an unknown God.”

May it be so. Amen and Blessed Be.

Music: #1007 *There's A River Flowin' in My Soul* – Margaret Johnston

Reading: *For a New Beginning* by John O'Donohue – Michelle

In out-of-the-way places of the heart,
Where your thoughts never think to wander,
This beginning has been quietly forming,
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

For a long time it has watched your desire,
Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,
Noticing how you willed yourself on,
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.

It watched you play with the seduction of safety
And the gray promises that sameness whispered,
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,
Wondered would you always live like this.

Then the delight, when your courage kindled,
And out you stepped onto new ground,
Your eyes young again with energy and dream,
A path of plenitude opening before you.

Though your destination is not yet clear
You can trust the promise of this opening;
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning
That is at one with your life's desire.

Awaken your spirit to adventure;
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.

Closing Words: *An Ending or a Prelude to More Glorious Beginnings?* by Michael A Schuler – Catherine

We have reached the end of this time
For the gathering of memory
And for letting the imagination play with future possibilities.
We have enjoyed magic moments and edified each other.
Shall it be concluded, then?

Or will this adventure, now commenced, continue?—
Our separate paths converging, meeting, merging
In the unending quest for love more perfect,
The joyous struggle for meaning more sufficient and life more abundant.

Is this ending to be an ending,
Or merely prelude to new, more glorious beginnings?
I pose the question;
In your hearts lies the answer.

Pause

Catherine: May it be so

Michelle: Amen

Catherine: and Blessed Be

TECH: STOP RECORD!

Announcements - Michelle