

*Order of Service – September 4, 2016  
Strangers, Stones, Water, Fire*

*Musical Prelude*

*Greeting -- ‘Cathedral’*

*1st Hymn: God Who Is Father, Mother, Green 287*

*Readings -- Leviticus, Rilke, Kindness, Luke*

*2nd Hymn: Oh Beautiful, for Spacious Skies, Red 68*

*Joys and Concerns*

*Musical interlude*

*Prayer -- Infinite Love, teach us what love can do.*

*3rd Hymn: Wayfaring Stranger, Blue 53*

*Pastoral reflection or message*

*Silent worship*

*4th Hymn: Kumbaya, Blue 52*

*Benediction --*

*Thank yous/ Introductions / Remembrances/Announcements/Afterthoughts*

*Postlude*

**Greeting:**

***Adaptation: James Hubbell: Cathedral*** *Awakening as if from a dream I turn to the news I hear the cracking, the rumbling of a cathedral falling the footing forgotten, the stones laid carelessly. I weep for all that is lost.*

*Then, I remember the hidden moon, the breathing in and out of the whole world  
And, I know that the earth awaits a new cathedral. And, I know that I must find  
my stone, And I must place it carefully.*

*A church has fallen. The very earth grieves. Come now friends, listen. find your  
stone. Lay it beside mine. Carefully, stone by stone, we will let the holy place rise,  
because we are alive and God calls to all of us, I am here, and here, and here. come,  
come, let us build again and again and again.*

*God calls to all of us. I am here. And we are here, together, thank God. So let's  
sing our first Hymn, Green 287, God Who is Father, Mother.*

**Readings:**

**Leviticus 19:34** *The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the stranger as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.*

**Kindness. Naomi Shihab Nye**

*Before you know what kindness really is you must lose things,  
feel the future dissolve in a moment like salt in a weakened broth.*

*What you held in your hand, what you counted and carefully saved, all this must go  
so you know how desolate the landscape can be between the regions of  
kindness... ..How you ride and ride thinking the bus will never stop, the  
passengers eating maize and chicken will stare out the window forever.*

*Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness you must travel where the Indian in  
a white poncho lies dead by the side of the road. You must see how this could be  
you, how he too was someone who journeyed through the night with plans and the  
simple breath that kept him alive.*

*Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside, you must know sorrow as the  
other deepest thing. You must wake up with sorrow. You must speak to it till your  
voice catches the thread of all sorrows and you see the size of the cloth. Then it is  
only kindness that makes sense anymore, only kindness that ties your shoes and  
sends you out into the day to gaze at bread, only kindness that raises its head from  
the crowd of the world to say It is I you have been looking for, and then goes with  
you everywhere like a shadow or a friend.*

**Adaptation: Rainer Maria Rilke: It's possible**

*I don't have much knowledge yet in grief— so this massive darkness makes me  
small. Oh God, be the master: make yourself fierce, break in:*

*then your great transforming fire will happen to me*

*And my great grief cry will happen to you, my tears the waters of the very deep.*

*Baptism of fire and water.*

*Life holds mystery for us yet. In a hundred places we can still sense the source: a  
play of pure powers that—when you feel it—brings you to your knees. There are  
yet words that come near the unsayable,*

*and, from crumbling stones, a new music to make a sacred dwelling in a place we  
cannot own.*

**Luke 19:40** But Jesus answered, "I say to you, if you keep quiet, the very stones will cry out."

**Second Hymn:** *Oh Beautiful, for Spacious Skies, Red 68*

**Prayer**

*God who is Father, Mother, guard and stay. The hour has come. We need you. We are brought to our knees. God among us, God in the stranger, we need you. God who walks with us when we are strangers, we need you. God who is strange, cast out and cast aside, God who breaks bread with strangers, we need you. God who suffers with those who suffer, who claims a table big enough for everyone. We need you. We bring all of our love and all of our fear and we need your help to carry it. God of this earth, God of fire, whose breath moved over the face of the waters, God who cannot be owned, whose Word is all that cannot be said, be with us in this time. Be with us in our waiting, in this hour of need, so that we might hear in the silence the new music even now arising from the crumbling stones. Give your people the patience of rock, as we wait for guidance. Give your people the depth of water, to grieve with the very earth, our home. Give your people the passion of fire, to act when that is your leading. Infinite love, teach us what Love can do.*

**Third Hymn:** *Wayfaring Stranger, Blue 53*

**Benediction**

*We had hoped that history would not call us in this way, but here we are. And here also, always, is God. Come now friends, listen. find your stone. Lay it beside mine. Carefully, stone by stone, we will let the holy place rise, because we are alive and God calls to all of us, I am here, and here, and here. come, come, let us build again and again and again. Life holds mystery for us yet. There are yet words that come near the unsayable, and, from crumbling stones, a new music to make a sacred dwelling in a place we cannot own.*

**Message:**

We awoke on Wednesday this week strangers in a strange land. At my children's school, which serves a great diversity of families -- I felt it: a sense of suspicion and distrust -- an eyeing of each other: which side are you on? Are you friend, or foe? Each side voted on Tuesday fearful of what their country would be like if the other side won. Each side was suspicious of the strangers on the other side. And now it seems even more true that whatever side we count ourselves on, there are people who seem strange to us, who are as strangers among us. **We are** as strangers among strangers, all of us sojourning in a strange land. And everyone, everyone wants to feel that this strange land is home.

And so this morning I brought with me elemental things that speak of our common home. I brought stones, for the good green Earth, so patient, so enduring, so generous, so forgiving. The poem that I began our worship with says "*Come now friends, listen. find your stone. Lay it beside mine. Carefully, stone by stone, we will let the holy place rise, because we are alive and God calls to all of us, I am here, and here, and here. come, come, let us build again and again.*" I'm going to pass this bowl around, and I invite you to find your stone.

I also brought water, blood of life, perfect miracle, cleansing, powerful, supple, element of lamentation and sorrow, of tears. Many tears were shed this week. And I brought fire. Flame of Holy Spirit. Breath of God, in and under and with and through all things. Convicting fire, fire of justice, light of truth. That which always was, is, and will be.

I believe God is elemental, our very substance, in whom we live and move and have our being. I believe God is our true home and God belongs to everyone, and to no one. No one owns the Sacred, and It is everyone's home. Everyone belongs in God. We come here to sing and pray and listen in the silence that speaks to all of us, whose voice is the Living Spirit in Whom No One is Excluded, and with Whom Strangers Sojourn.

Over the past four days, in our country, women have been assaulted for wearing the hijab, property has been defaced with swastikas, LGBT Americans have been threatened, and African Americans have been menaced and attacked by fellow Americans touting the election of Donald Trump as the dawn of a new America,

one where they consider the ugliest of racial and social animus to have the seal of presidential approval. Among other things that this election has accomplished, it has excised the deeply infected abscess of racism in our country, and the wound is weeping. And it has exposed class divisions that have long been encouraged, wedges driven deep by the powers and principalities to keep the people who really have much more in common than those who benefit from our divisions would like us to see. Poor people with my skin color and poor people of darker skin than I have always been more kin than stranger, but now we see what befalls us when we are encouraged to dwell upon our strangeness.

And so it is written that The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; yes, but what if the citizens among us are as strangers?

That is, in fact, what we have heard many Trump supporters saying. The citizens among us are strangers, they have said, in anger and fear, and resentment...and deeper, maybe: in sorrow, in desperation, in loss, longing for home, for belonging. What is asked of us, when such suffering is revealed?

Because here we have a point of agreement, of conversion. I too feel there are citizens among me who are strangers, not those whose skin color or religion are different from mine, but those like the woman who shouted "Go Back to Africa!" to a woman of color in Minnesota, or the children in a middle-school in Michigan who chanted "Build the WALL" at Latino students.

Those are strangers to me. And what is it that we are to do with the strangers among us? We are to love. Love...! Love, the Scriptures tell us. In our reading from the Book of Leviticus -- Jesus' scripture, words he would have known inside and out, and prayed himself, bowed his head over -- a command is given "love the stranger as yourself, for you were strangers in Egypt: I am the Lord your God." The Second Testament gives Jesus the same lesson to preach: "For I was a stranger and you welcomed me." it says, in the Gospel according to Matthew.

YEs, Yes, I want my country to be that country, the one that welcomes strangers, refugees, takes care of the tired and poor, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free -- but Welcome and love someone who snarls racist insults, who threatens the vulnerable with violence, who bludgeons others with untruths?

When I observe the strangeness of my fellow citizens, I confess that I do not know how to love. I believe in love, I believe so much that we have no idea the real power of love. But. I am afraid. And that is why I need so much Rilke's prayer: *Oh God, be the master: make yourself fierce, break in: then your great transforming fire will happen to me And my great grief cry will happen to you, my tears the waters of the very deep. A baptism of fire and water.* Yes. I think we are facing a baptism of fire and water. Of Spirit.

Christopher Sammond shared with me the message that he will be giving today at Fall Sessions, and in it he says "I believe we are at the dawn of a moment in history that will shake us as a nation to our very foundations. We will be called to new depths in our practice. We will be challenged in ways I can only imagine. We will be tempered. It will not be easy."

I agree with Christopher. On Wednesday, November 9th, when Donald J. Trump became our country's next president, we did something decisive, something momentous, something with consequences. The sun rose and the sun set on a day when we stood in the sweep of history's arc. Because November 9 was also the 78th anniversary of Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass, when Nazi storm troopers throughout Germany mounted a coordinated attack against Jews, burning synagogues, desecrating Jewish cemeteries, and breaking the shop windows of 7500 Jewish-owned stores. 51 years later, that same night, the Berlin wall fell. After several weeks of civil unrest, on November 9, 1989, crowds of East Germans crossed and climbed onto the Wall, joined by West Germans on the other side in a unified celebration.

And then we came to November 9 2016. this moment, our moment, our time in history. Clarissa Pinkola Estes wrote, in the harrowing days after September 11th and our country's response of escalating violence, "We hoped history would not call us in this way, but here we are."

Yes, here we are. Since the walls of Jericho fell, laid waste in the horror of ancient holy war, walls have been broken, stone by stone, in both love and fear, and walls have been built, placed stone by stone, in both love and fear. In this season, our season, of wall building and toppling cathedrals, what is asked of us? In what do we place our faith, and what does that faith ask of us?

The Dalai Lama once wrote “My religion is simple. My religion is kindness.” For now, in these tender and terrible reeling days, our faith and practice must also be simple. We can start by Listening to rocks. Patient, absorbing shock, watching, being carried, taking always the long view, the long endurance, with equanimity and peace: they have something to teach us of our Bedrock God, with their silent humming, their minerals that smell of space and time. Believe in the God of stone, and water, and fire. Put your faith there. Trust in this God. Be at home in this God, in Whom everyone belongs. Pray to and for the water -- blood of life, earth’s tears. This, sorrow, too, is our true home, the other deepest thing, sister to kindness, the stone at the bottom of a very deep well. This is our basic nature, the nature of broken hearted love. Love is hard. Kindness will be the balm, the guide, the strength, the practice that leads us through the baptismal fire that is to come. For now, just see if you can do one kind thing every day. When indecency is endorsed from the highest office of the land, small mercies and kindnesses are a defiant witness, a radical practice, a testimony of faith in a God who excludes no one.

And finally, remember, “if you keep quiet, the very stones will cry out.” There are two meanings in these words. It could mean: if you listen, you will be able to hear the stones crying. If you are silent enough, patient and listen enough, you will be able to hear the wisdom of the ages, crying to you. Or it could mean: if you are silent when you ought to speak, the stones will cry out in protest. If you are silent when you must speak up, the very earth will raise its voice. In this time, and in the times to come, we are in need of both lessons.