

TWO EXAMPLES OF SPECIAL CONGREGATIONAL LITURGIES:

King Sunday

All Souls Community Church

January 19, 2003

The Reverend Doctor Brent A. Smith

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My House Shall Be Called A House of Prayer for All People

PRELUDE

*CALL TO WORSHIP (To be sung by the congregation)

*Now with Creation's morning song,
Let us, as children of the day,
With waken'd hearts and purpose strong,
Have eyes to measure life's array;
With guileless mind, and heart sincere,
The works of darkness cast away.*

*INVOCATION

Behold, I make all things new – former things are passed away. God grant that we will be participants in this newness and this magnificent development. (Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution, Washington, James M., editor, “A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr., Harper and Row, 1986, p278)

*CHALICE LIGHTING

*This Chalice is lit to remember a truth,
Consecrated through the ages
By the service and sacrifice
Of individuals and communities:
There abides a unity and freedom of the Spirit
Expressed through a love for all souls.*

(Ending with the following affirmation spoken in unison)

Into this house of light we come to seek that which is just and to find that which is good, and here we remember those whose lives are darkened by the greed and wrong of others. We have not purged the commerce of our times of those harsh ways that thwart the hopes and dreams of many. In this house of peace we remember wars and rumors of wars; we have made but feeble effort to understand the people of the world and to foster peace among the nations. In this house of joy we remember all sorrowing and troubled

folk. Let us here be gathered into a common power of good will which shall issue in lasting peace and larger right.

Amen.

***DOXOLOGY**

*From all that dwell below the skies,
Let faith and hope with love arise,
Let beauty, truth, and good be sung,
Through every land by every tongue.*

Amen.

* * *

“There is properly, no history only biography.” –Ralph Waldo Emerson

THE BIRTH OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

It was on a cold and cloudy Saturday, January 15, 1929, that M.L. entered the world, so quiet that the doctor feared him stillborn and had to spank him several times before he cried. The elder King, of course, wanted his first son named after him. Since he was called Mike (his mother’s name for him), the doctor entered Michael King, Jr., on the baby’s birth certificate. Five years later – the year M.L. joined the church – Daddy King corrected both their names to Martin Luther King Sr. and Jr. But Daddy still went by Mike, his son by M.L. In the big house on Auburn Avenue, there was room for only one Mike King. (Oates, p 4)

MUSICAL RESPONSE [*One verse of, “Woke Up This Morning...”*]

WHEN HE WAS A YOUNG BOY

In his preschool years, M.L.’s closest playmate was a white boy whose father owned a store across the street from the King home. In September 1935, the two chums entered school – separate schools, M.L. noticed... Then the parents of his friend announced that M.L. could no longer play with their son. But *why?* he sputtered. “Because we are white and you are colored,” was the reply.

Later, around the dinner table, he confided in his parents what had happened, and for the first time they told him about “the race problem.” But his mother counseled him, “You must never feel that you are less than anybody else. You must always feel that you are *somebody.*”

Segregation caused a tension in the boy, a tension between his mother’s injunction and a system that demeaned and insulted him every day... He struggled with the pain and rage he felt when a white woman in a downtown store slapped him and called him “a little N”... when he stood on the very spot in Atlanta where whites had lynched a Negro ... when he witnessed night riding Klansmen beat Negroes in the streets there ... when he

saw “with my own eyes” white cops brutalize Negro children. When his parents admonished him to love whites because it was his Christian duty, M.L. asked defiantly: “How can I love a race of people who hate me?”

So it was that M.L. began his real education in Atlanta, Georgia. (Oates, pp10-12)

HE DISCOVERS HIS VOICE

BAS: M.L. entered Morehouse College when he was only fifteen, and graduated in 1948 with a degree in sociology. He decided to study for his B.A. in divinity at Crozer Seminary in Pennsylvania. He had decided to follow his father, his grandfather, his great grandfather and his father’s brother into the ministry! At Crozer he broke from the Christian fundamentalism of his upbringing, studied the social gospel movement, the attempt by Christians to read Jesus’ ministry as one of social change, but held deep reservations about the power of Christian love to create that change. He finished at the top of his class and chose to continue his education at Boston University’s School of Theology, where he would gain his PHD and meet his soul mate, Coretta Scott. And upon graduation face an ironic choice.

Several churches expressed an interest in him. But his firmest offer came from Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, which was looking for a new pastor and invited him down to give a trial sermon in January 1954...

On Sunday morning he stood at the pulpit of Dexter, surrounded by stained-glass windows, and gazed out over a packed sanctuary. He preached on “The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life”... “Love yourself, if that means healthy self-respect. That is the length of life. Love your neighbor as yourself; you are commanded to do that. That is the breadth of life. But never forget that there is an even greater commandment, ‘Love the Lord thy god with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.’ This is the height of life.”

The sermon was a great success... He was unanimously chosen as pastor...

The offer threw King into a quandary. Did he really want [to return] to live in the Deep South, with all its racial woes? Coretta [his new wife] was hardly enthusiastic about returning to the South. He thought about how much and how long he had resented segregation, and recalled the episodes that had hurt him so... Could he endure all that again? But here was a chance to do something about it...

On April 14, 1954, he accepted the Dexter offer and preached his first sermon as Dexter’s pastor on a May Sunday in 1954...

That same month the United States Supreme Court handed down their decision in the case of Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas. (Oates, 47-50)

MUSICAL RESPONSE

“Follow the Drinking Gourd”

-Spiritual

The deceptively simple words to this song conceal subversive directives to African Americans escaping slavery of the South. The 'drinking gourd' referred to is the star constellation, the Big Dipper. The 'old man a-waiting' was a peg-legged sailor who incited the slaves to find the trail that would lead north to freedom. The location of the trail was designated as 'where the great big river meets the little river' and 'the river ends between the hills.' In reality, this beautiful song hides within itself a document of American history!

THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT AND THE BEGINNING OF HIS PUBLIC MINISTRY

In 1955, a twenty-six year old preacher began a journey that would take him and the people of his country into a new day. On December 1, 1955, a seamstress, Rosa Parks, boarded the Cleveland Avenue bus in downtown Montgomery, refused to give up her seat, was arrested and convicted of violating Alabama's laws of segregation. The Reverend Doctor King was chosen to lead the organization that would organize a massive boycott of the city's buses by African Americans. He would later write, "The action caught me unawares. It happened so quickly that I did not even have time to think it through. It is probable that if I had, I would have declined the nomination." But he accepted it and later reflected upon how it had changed his life's direction. This is what King said. This is what The Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr., said:

I didn't have to worry about anything. I have a marvelous mother and father. They went out of their way to provide everything for their children... I went right on through school. I never had to drop out to work or anything. And you know, I was about to conclude that life had been wrapped up for me in a Christmas package.

Now of course I was religious, I grew up in the church... But I had grown up in a kind of inherited religion and I had never felt an experience with God in the way that you must, and have it, if you're going to walk the lonely paths of this life.

Everything was done [for me], and if I had a problem I could always call Daddy King – my earthly father. Things were solved. But one day after finishing school, I was called to a little church, down in Montgomery, Alabama. And I started preaching there. Things were going well in that church, it was a marvelous experience. But one day a year later, a lady by the name of Rosa Parks decided that she wasn't going to take it any longer... It was the beginning of a movement... and the people of Montgomery asked me to serve them as a spokesman, and as the president of a new organization... that came into being to lead the boycott. I couldn't say no.

And then we started our struggle together. Things were going well for the first few days but then, about ten or fifteen days later, after the white people in Montgomery knew that we meant business, they started doing some nasty things. They started making nasty telephone calls, and it came to the point that some days more than forty telephone calls would come in, threatening my life, the life of my family, the life of my child. I took it for a while, in a strong manner. (Garrow, pp56-58)

THE STRUGGLE OF HIS SOUL AT MIDNIGHT

But several nights into the boycott, unable to be at peace with himself, King feared he could take the mounting pressure no longer. It was the most important night of his life, the one he always would think back to in future years when the pressures again seemed to be great. This is what Dr. King said:

It was around midnight. You can have some strange experiences at midnight.

I sat there and thought about a beautiful little daughter who had just been born... She was the darling of my life. I'd come in night after night and see that little gentle smile. And I sat at that kitchen table thinking about that little girl and thinking about the fact that she could be taken away from me any minute.

And I started thinking about a dedicated, devoted and loyal wife, who was over there asleep. And she could be taken from me, or I could be taken from her. And I got to the point that I couldn't take it any longer. I was weak. Something said to me, you can't call on Daddy now, he's up in Atlanta a hundred and seventy-five miles away. You can't even call on Mama now. You've got to call on that something in that person that your Daddy used to tell you about, that power that can make a way out of no way.

And I discovered then that religion had to become real to me, and I had to know God for myself. And I bowed down over that cup of coffee sitting at that kitchen table. I never will forget it... I prayed a prayer, and I prayed out loud that night. I said, "Lord, I'm down here trying to do what's right. I think I'm right. I think the cause that we represent is right. But Lord, I must confess that I'm weak now. I'm faltering. I'm losing my courage. And I can't let the people see me like this because if they see me weak and losing my courage, they will begin to get weak."

And it seemed at that moment that I could hear an inner voice saying to me, "Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo I will be with you, even until the end of the world." I heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone. No never alone. No never alone. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone. (Garrow, pp 56-58)

*HYMN: "LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING"

* * * * *

WELCOME

OFFERTORY

HE WRITES A LETTER FROM THE BIRMINGHAM JAIL

On December 20, 1956, 382 days after Rosa Parks' arrest, she and Dr. King and other clergy boarded and rode the South's first integrated bus. Several years and numerous marches later, King was arrested in Birmingham, Alabama for participating in a civil rights demonstration. Eight prominent "liberal" Alabama clergymen, all white, published an open letter that called on King to allow the struggle to be confined in the courts for fear of civil disturbance. This is what King said. This is what The Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr., said:

I am in Birmingham because injustice is here... Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly...

One may well ask, "How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?" The answer is found in the fact that there are two types of laws: there are just and there are unjust laws...

Now what is the difference between the two?... Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust...

I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice, and that when they fail to do this they become dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress... We who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive...

I had hoped that the white moderate would reject the myth of time... It is the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills... We must come to see that human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation...

The contemporary church is often a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. It is so often the arch-supporter of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent and often vocal sanction of things as they are...

I hope that circumstances will soon make it possible for me to meet each of you, not as an integrationist or a civil rights leader, but as a fellow clergyman and a Christian brother...

Yours for the cause of Peace and Brotherhood,
Martin Luther King, Jr. (Letter from Birmingham Jail, Washington, James M., editor, "A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr., Harper and Row, 1986, pp289ff)

HE TELLS OF A DREAM
[PLAYING OF "MY COUNTRY 'TIS OF THEE" BEGINS SOFTLY]

King remained tireless in his efforts to bring a new birth of freedom to his land and to the world. It was his dream, fashioned years before he revealed it to the world on the steps of the Lincoln memorial. He revealed this dream for the first time, appropriately enough, at the commencement address at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. This is what King said. This is what The Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr., said:

America is essentially a dream as yet unfulfilled. It is a dream of a land where men of all races, of all nationalities and of all creeds can live together as brothers. The substance of the dream is expressed in these sublime words lifted to cosmic proportions: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This is the dream.

It does not say some men, but it says all men... It says that each individual has certain basic rights that are neither conferred by nor derived from the state, for they are God-given... The American dream reminds us that every man is heir to the legacy of worthiness...

Ever since the Founding Fathers of our nation dreamed this noble dream, America has been something of a schizophrenic personality, tragically divided against herself. On the one hand we have proudly professed the principles of democracy, and on the other hand we have sadly practiced the very antithesis of those principles... But the shape of the world today does not permit us the luxury of an anemic democracy... (The American Dream, Washington, James M., editor, "A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr., Harper and Row, 1986, pp208ff)

I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today!... Let Freedom ring! (I Have a Dream, Washington, James M., editor, "A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr., Harper and Row, 1986, p219)

*CONGREGATION SINGS SLOWLY: My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing.
Land where by fathers died,
Land of the pilgrims pride,*

*From every mountain side,
Let freedom ring!*

HE ASKS ALL WHO LOVE FREEDOM AND JUSTICE: “HOW LONG?”

And later, from the railing of the bloody Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma to the state capital steps in Montgomery, could be heard the cry of the prophet:

I know you are asking today, “How long will it take?” I come to say to you this afternoon however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because truth pressed to earth will rise again.

How long? Not long, because no life can live forever.

How long? Not long, because you still reap what you sow.

How long? Not long, because the arm of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.

How long? Not long, because mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord... (Our God is Marching On, Washington, James M., editor, “A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr., Harper and Row, 1986, p230)

*HYMN *“Battle Hymn of the Republic”*

HE WINS THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE AND ADDRESSES THE WORLD

Your Majesty, your Royal Highness, Mr. President, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

I accept the Nobel Prize for Peace at a moment when twenty-two million Negroes of the United States of America are engaged in a creative battle to end the long night of racial injustice. I accept this award in behalf of a civil rights movement which is moving with determination and a majestic scorn for risk and danger to establish a reign of freedom and a rule of justice...

After contemplation, I conclude that this award which I received on behalf of that movement is profound recognition that nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral question of our time – the need for man to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to violence and oppression...

If this is to be achieved, man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love...

I accept this prize on behalf of all men who love peace and brotherhood. (Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, Washington, James M., editor, “A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr., Harper and Row, 1986, p 224)

HE GOES TO MEMPHIS AND TO THE MOUNTAINTOP

In April of 1968, Dr. King was in Memphis, Tennessee, to support the city's sanitary workers in their struggle for dignity and livable wages, the evidence of justice in a free democracy devoted to civil rights for all. On the night of April 3, this is what the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr., said:

I'm delighted to see each of you here tonight in spite of a storm warning. You reveal that you are determined to go on anyhow. Something is happening in Memphis, something is happening in our world...

And then I got to Memphis. And some began to say the threats, or talk about the threats that were out. What would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers?

Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do god's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the Promised Land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. (I See the Promised Land, Washington, James M., editor, "A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr., Harper and Row, 1986, p 286)

HIS LIFE IS FINISHED BUT THE TASK IS NOT YET DONE

On April 4, 1968, Robert F. Kennedy, in a speech deliver to his political supporters in Indianapolis, Indiana, had to deliver the message that others had to deliver that day, until like twilight it had blanketed all the earth and its inhabitants in darkness.

Robert Kennedy Speech on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Death

April 4, 1968

Indianapolis, Indiana

"I have bad news for you, for all of our fellow citizens, and people who love peace all over the world, and that is that Martin Luther King was shot and killed tonight.

"Martin Luther King dedicated his life to love and to justice for his fellow human beings, and he died because of that effort.

"In this difficult day, in this difficult time for the United States, it is perhaps well to ask what kind of a nation we are and what direction we want to move in... We will have difficult times; we've had difficult times in the past; we will have difficult times in

the future. It is not the end of violence; it is not the end of lawlessness; it is not the end of disorder.

“But the vast majority of white people and the vast majority of black people in this country want to live together, want to improve the quality of our life, and want justice for all human beings who abide in our land...

“So I shall ask you tonight to return home, to say a prayer for the family of Martin Luther King ... and say a prayer for our country and for our people.”

* * * * *

On April 9th, a hot and humid day in Atlanta, Rev. Ralph Abernathy officiated over Dr. King’s funeral service in Ebenezer Baptist Church, where almost 800 people were packed in the sanctuary, while nearly 100,000 surrounded the church outside and thousands more waited at nearby Morehouse College, where a public service was scheduled later... After the service at Ebenezer Church the pallbearers carried him out to a special hearse – a farm cart drawn by two mules, which symbolized his poor people’s campaign, his own last and greatest dream. Then with bells shattering the humid day and 120 million American watching on television, the cart started forward to the clop, clop of the mules, carrying Martin Luther King on his last freedom march to the tree-shaded campus of Morehouse College, where he had discovered Thoreau and found his calling under the guidance and inspiration of Morehouse professor Benjamin Mays. Mays gave the eulogy to King, his former student, who had had every reason to hate America but who had loved her passionately instead and had sung of her glory and promise more eloquently than anyone of his generation, maybe of any generation.

“We have assembled here from every section of this great nation and from others parts of the world to give thanks to God that He gave to America, Martin Luther King, Jr. Truly God is no respecter of persons. How strange! God called the grandson of a slave on his father’s side, and said to him: Martin Luther, speak to America about war and peace; about social justice and racial discrimination; about its obligation to the poor; and about nonviolence as a way of perfecting social change in a world of brutality and war.”

His anguished staff gathered round the coffin and prayed together for guidance and strength, their hearts breaking in this, their final farewell. Then his family, friends, and followers escorted him to South View Cemetery, blooming with dogwood and fresh green boughs of spring, and buried him near his grandparents, near his Grandmother Williams whom he had loved so as a boy. On his crypt, hewn into the marble, were the words of the old slave spiritual he had quoted so often: Free at Last, Free at Last, Thank God almighty, I’m free at last. (Oates, pp 495-498)

Soloist: “Precious Lord, Take My Hand” (No Accompaniment)

*HYMN

“We Shall Overcome” (No Accompaniment)

*BENEDICTION

* POSTLUDE

* The congregation stands.

* * * Late seating.

Minister: Dr. Brent A. Smith

Soloist:

Reader:

Resources:

Oates, Stephen B., "Let the Trumpet Sound: A Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.,"
HarperPerennial edition, 1994.

Garrow, David J., "Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern
Christian Leadership Conference," Random House, Inc., 1986.

Washington, James M., editor, "A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin
Luther King, Jr.," Harper and Row, 1986.

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The Reverend Doctor Brent A. Smith

THANKSGIVING FESTIVAL

November 23, 2008

"My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people."

PRELUDE

INTROIT *How Can I Keep from Singing* –All Souls Adult Choir

*CHILDREN'S PROCESSIONAL: #68 *Come, Ye Thankful People Come*

*INVOCATION AND CHALICE LIGHTING (Ending with the following unison affirmation)

INVOCATION: We gather this day in the spirit of thanks and in the spirit of giving. Surrounded by life and the good fruits of the earth, we would be reminded that our gratitude is not in proportion to what we've been given, nor is our sharing to be done in hopes of a future reward. This day we would remember that gratitude is the fullest and most complete expression of what human existence means. Giving is Holy because the life we've been given is a sacred and wondrous thing. We lift up our hearts in gratitude for our lives and for the blessings of the good earth that sustains us.

CHALICE LIGHTING: We light this Chalice to remember a truth, consecrated through the ages by the service and sacrifice of individuals and communities: There abides a unity and freedom of the spirit expressed through a love for all souls.

CONGREGATIONAL COVENANT [in unison]:

We pledge to walk together in the ways of truth and affection,

As best we know them now,

Or may learn them in days to come;

That we and our children may be fulfilled;

And that we may speak to the world;

In words and actions of peace and goodwill.

*DOXOLOGY

From all that dwell below the skies,

Let faith and hope with love arise,

Let beauty, truth, and good be sung,

Through every land by every tongue.

Amen.

* * * * *

READING: *The Pilgrim's First Winter*, History of the Plimouth Plantation, William Bradford

In these hard and difficult beginnings they found some discontents and murmurings arise amongst some, and mutinous speeches and carriages in others; but they were soon quelled and overcome by the wisdom, patience, and just and equal carriage of things by the Governor and better part, which clave faithfully together in the main.

But that which was most sad and lamentable was, that in two or three months time half of their company died, especially in January and February, being the depth of winter, and wanting houses and other comforts; being infected with the scurvy and other diseases, which this long voyage and their incommode condition had brought upon them; so as there died sometimes two or three of a day, in the aforesaid time; that of one hundred and odd persons, scarce fifty remained. And of these in the time of most distress, there was but six or seven sound persons, who, to their great commendations be it spoken, spared no pains, night or day, but with abundance of toil and hazard of their own health, fetched them wood, made them fires, drest them meat, made their beds, washed their loathsome clothes, clothed and unclothed them; in a word, did all the homely and necessary offices for them which dainty and queasy stomachs cannot endure to hear mentioned, and all this without any grudging in the least, showing herein their true love unto their friends and brethren. A rare example and worthy to be remembered. Two of these seven were Mr. William Brewster, their reverend Elder, and Myles Standish, their Captain and military commander, unto whom myself and many others were much beholden in our low and sick condition. And yet the Lord so upheld these persons as in their general calamity they were not at all infected either with sickness or lameness. And what I have said of these, I may say of many others who died in this general visitation, and others yet living, that whilst they had health, yea, or any strength continuing, they were not wanting to any that had need of them. And I doubt not but their recompense is with the Lord.

MORNING PRAYER AND SILENT MEDITATION

Eternal God, today when the land lies beautiful and quiet and the colored leaf is still, let our spirits pause and breathe softly, and meet what seems to be the spirit of the autumn world. Let our hearts be calm and our minds serene and open.

Here in this fullness of the year bring to us the grateful memory of all we have loved, the days, the persons, the animals, the

flights of birds, the presence of children, and every moment we have known of quiet exultation.

If only the peace of this day could fall upon all lands and people, resolving their enmities, healing their troubles. If only the sense of a greater presence of life than the violence of their struggles could come like this autumn to bless them all. Soothe our own apprehension of passing time, and let us welcome what time there is for life as if this were our first day of real hearing; our first day of real knowing.

In our own thanks for the miracle of being let us bring to the world and find ourselves some peace and wholeness that have before now escaped the world and us also. And let our loves be strong and our truth be told in this most human season of the year, and let our hands attend to those about us as the sign of recognition and of welcome upon the earth.

A WORD OF THANKSGIVING

We gather together in thanksgiving for our lives and all their blessings: the fruit of the good earth, for our homes, for the bright blue sky and the fresh autumn air, and for our children.

SERVICE OF CHRISTENING AND DEDICATION

Congregational Pledge: *Now, we, the people of All Souls Community Church, understanding our solemn obligations to share in the upbringing of this/these beloved child/children, do hereby pledge ourselves to promote his/her/their welfare in mind, body, and soul, to the end that he/she/they may grow freely in beauty, love, and truth.*

MUSICAL RESPONSE: *The Lord Go Safely with You*

-All Souls Children's Choir

READING: *The First Thanksgiving*

In Governor William Bradford's *History of the Plimouth Plantation*, there is this description of the Pilgrim's first Thanksgiving:

They began now to gather in the small harvest they had, and to fit up their houses and dwellings against winter, being all well recovered in health and strength. And now began to come in store of fowl, as winter approached, of which this place did abound when they came first. And besides water fowl, there was great store of wild turkeys, of which they took many. Others were exercised in fishing, about cod

and bass, and other fish, of which they took good store. At the above time, four men were sent a-fowling, so that we might after a special manner rejoice together after having gathered the fruit of our labors. They four killed in one day as much fowl, as with little help besides, served the company almost a week. At which time, amongst other recreations, we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and among the rest their great Chief, Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted; and they went out and killed five deer, which they brought to the plantation, and bestowed upon the governor, Miles Standish and others. And though it be not always so plentiful as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God we are so far from want, that we often wish you partakers of our plenty.

MUSICAL RESPONSE: *Feelin' Good*

-All Souls Youth Choir

A THANKSGIVING BLESSING:

For years now it has been the custom of this congregation to celebrate the coming of Thanksgiving Day with all gathering together to hear this story told again and remember the good things we have to be thankful for at Thanksgiving time. And so we have come today, in the spirit of thanks, to lift up our hearts in gratitude for our lives and for the blessings of the good earth, which sustains us. In the living of our lives may we give back a hundredfold of the gifts we have been given. And may gratitude be in our hearts and the gift of sharing always in our hands.

CHILDREN'S RECESSIONAL AND OFFERTORY

WELCOME

ANTHEM: *What a Wonderful World*

-All Souls Adult Choir

SERMON: *"Thank You for this Good Life"*

For seven years now we have gathered on the Sunday before Thanksgiving to see how much our children have grown. For seven years now we have gathered on the Sunday before Thanksgiving to bring food from our pantries to offer to those whose pantries are bare. For seven years now we have told the same story over and over again because it is a story that is central to our faith tradition and because it says something deep and true about the human spirit and what is possible amongst men and women.

At the end of their first year together there were less people in Plymouth than are in this room; and yet, they are remembered. Just a few years after they sat down and broke bread with the natives the two groups would be at war. And later other English

faiths would come to the shores of Massachusetts and the relationships amongst those groups would be rancorous and spiteful because of their intolerance towards those who believed differently than they. They remain a small and cantankerous group to this day, now the Unitarian Church in Plymouth. But, still, they are remembered.

It is amazing that the Mayflower bore our spiritual forebears to this continent, so different are we now than they. Natives no longer rule these lands but exist as nations within this nation. Our land is dotted with thousands upon thousands of different faiths, not just different forms of Christianity like their day. And from that one band came over one thousand of our churches. Yet, they are remembered, and even in those of our churches that avoid remembering them there exists the lingering guilt of why not? Even warts and all they are our ancestors.

Because they remind us of two truths about human existence. They came to this continent to be free, in their own way and not like how we would conceive of freedom. But, they risked their lives, which over half of them gave in full measure, to be free. Spiritual freedom is what human life was formed for, and to this day we struggle to be free of the fear and anxiety that drives us to disrespect and mistreat one another. To this day we struggle to be free of the fear and anxiety that smothers hope in us, and leads us to treat life as a burdensome weight to be simply endured. When we remember their story we are reminded it is in some ways like ours; that the fullest way we can live, is to live free in a community of like-hearted souls.

And they remind us, too, that feeling freedom in this spiritual kind of way is possible only for the heart that is nourished on gratitude. It is the “thank you” life that is the spiritual life, the fullest kind of living. It is not the life that believes certain correct doctrines that is the fullest kind of living. It is not the life that flees from religion that is the fullest kind of living. It is the “thank you” life that is the fullest kind of living, the spiritual life. The “thank you” brings food for others out of gratitude. The “thank you” life delights and enjoys the company of others, and seeks out ways to be in fellowship with others regardless of like-mindedness or agreement or sameness. The “thank you” life is the life filled with gratitude, and by virtue of its cup overflowing with thanksgiving, is free.

And we bring children in here to worship not for their benefit primarily, but for ours. That through them we would remember how through our thoughts, beliefs, and deeds, life can be diminished and belittled, or enlarged in hope and increased in promise. Life can be viewed as burden or bounty, and it is the ones who trust in life, have faith in life, who invest in its future through their gratitude and thanksgiving, and are free.

Some say the Pilgrims were grateful because they had survived. Perhaps instead, they survived because they had learned how to be grateful.

*O Lord, thou hast given me so much.
Give me one thing more: the grateful heart.
Not a heart that is thankful when it pleases me*

*As if thy blessings had spare days.
But such a heart whose very pulse is
Thy praise.*

AMEN.

HYMN #67 "We Sing Now Together"

BENEDICTION

Be not afraid, for we have been formed for a noble purpose and did not make ourselves. We have been created to be free and strive to liberate the human spirit.. May gratitude be in our hearts and the gift of sharing always in our hands, until a liberty of the spirit governs over each and love blossoms in the hearts of all.

BENEDICTION RESPONSE

—All Souls Adult Choir

POSTLUDE

Minister: The Reverend Doctor Brent A. Smith
Music Coordinator: Ms. Monique Salinas-Stauffer
R.E. Coordinator: Ms. Lynn Shackelford
Youth ROOTS Coming of Age Readers: Ms. Mikaela Harris, Ms. Kathleen Johnson, Ms. Samantha Mohny, Mr. Chris Symons

**Special Liturgical Sundays
All Souls Community Church
Grand Rapids, Michigan**

January: King Sunday

February: Lincoln Sunday

March or April: Easter Sunday

May:

- 1) High School Senior Sunday [or in early June]
- 2) Flower Communion
- 3) Youth ROOTS 9th Grade Coming of Age Graduation
- 4) Memorial Day

September: Homecoming Sunday [first Sunday after Labor Day]

October: All Souls Sunday

**November: Thanksgiving Festival [Sunday before Thanksgiving];
Thanksgiving Dinner that evening**

December:

- 1) Christmas Sunday (Sunday before Christmas)
- 2) Christmas Eve
- 3) Time Being Sunday (between Christmas and New Year's Day)