

Life's Calling "Shining Souls Stand Up!"

A Sermon on the Occasion of the Ordination of Rev. Matthew McHale

This sermon utilizes musical anthems, choir pieces and readings as text

Look at you beautiful shining souls...Do feel that Higher Love? Are you filled with that higher love? Yes. Indeed. We are, in fact, called here today by love, aren't we?

We're called by our love for Matthew, and by the faith that embraces us as we affirm the calling of Love and Life that Matthew has answered and will live in the fresh, unique way that no other can - exuberantly, sincerely, wisely, bravely, prophetically...

Life called and Matthew answered - because you, my friend and colleague, were made for these times. Nurtured by awesome parents, cherished mentors, and the loving school and faith communities from whose influence you continue live, shaped by experiences of the beauty and suffering of this world, and responding with your big broken open heart and shining soul. We celebrate you and your calling today.

And we acknowledge that you enter ministry at a momentous time in earth's history - this is something you know well, Matthew. It has propelled you into ministry. It is an auspicious time, I think too, coinciding with the Pope's last day in US. His was a whirlwind visit and I'm sorry he couldn't stop by today, because the Pope's emphasis on integral ecology - including the environment, the poor, the immigrant, income inequality, those most effected by a destructive capitalist system are concerns that you share.

Along with this, as The Rev. Marlin Lavanhar, of All Soul's Tulsa, reminded us at the Service of the Living Tradition at General Assembly this June, the last church year began with Ferguson... and ended with Charlotte... and this year has continued with the assault on black bodies.

These are the intersecting issues that you are called to address in your ministry and to lead *us* in our work.

You were made for these times and your soul shines with a higher love, my brother.

And, friends, thankfully it is not Matthew's call alone to shine a light and soul in this time of unprecedented peril and great opportunity.

Life's calling
All
all around
All That Is

Life's calling....

(can you hear it?)

From the depths

It emerges

Stirring
Longing
Luring
Love
Leading
Hearts
beating for justice, solidarity, peace, compassion

Hearts beating
Pulsing through bodies -

Mine
Yours
Ours
Earth's

Earth's song, is much like a lament, a parched or drenched or frozen cry –
“torn hearts cry out in pain” and we are told “do not lose heart,”
rather let your heart break wide open to let in the pain
and trust that your heart can hold it...
trust that feeling the pain of the world means that you are alive and you are awake
–

you are a brave shining soul
the pain we know is a sign our interdependence

Earth's song, still though comforts like a lullaby –
a dove's coo, the breeze through trees, the ocean ceaseless swells
(whatever it is for you)

Earth's song
Fills our open broken hearts, and we feel renewed once again by what? By Love...
Washing over us with the memory of who and whose we are
And where we came from, and what we are here for –
we were made for these times
and we remember not to lose hope...

As I watched Pope Francis walk in to address Congress on Thursday, I texted my good friend and colleague, Rev. Peggy Clark: “Why the heck am I crying just watching him walk in?”

She replied, “Feels like hope, walking.”

More tears sprang to my eyes.

That was it. It felt like hope, walking.

We need hope, walking.

We – you, me, and the many others striving for the common good and to care for our common home –

we are hope, walking or moving through the world however we can.

Life’s calling - Everything is connected. Everything is at stake. Everything we do matters.

Here I think about Rev. Dr. LoraKim Joyner, a UU minister and wildlife veterinarian, who tells a story about her work in Honduras with the indigenous communities.

Her goal is to help support their efforts to preserve the last 150 Scarlet Macaws left in this country that fly over their ancestral lands.

In her work LoraKim met Tomas, an elder of the village, who tried to stop the illegal poaching, and the destructive logging, and cattle ranching. For his efforts, he made enemies who ambushed him one day, and he was shot 4 times. He nearly died. His whole village had to flee because they were likewise threatened with their lives. Yet, 4 months later he returned to the ghost-like village to work with with LoraKim and others on parrot conservation. She tells that they had to hire a squad of soldiers from the Honduran military to accompany them and keep them safe. I saw a picture of Tomas showing the scars from the gun shot.

When LoraKim asked Tomas why he was willing to risk his life. He replied, “Pastora, Everything is at risk so I am willing to risk everything. If we lose the parrots, we lose our way of life.”

Everything is at risk and so I am willing to risk everything...

Hearing the words that came to me was: Everything is Connected. And everything is at stake” And everything we do matters.”

In this interdependent web of existence, what we do or don’t do matters and bodies count –

The earth body, animals bodies...all bodies - women’s bodies, trans bodies, differently abled bodies, black and brown bodies, and 3-year old bodies in red shirts and blue pants that wash up on a foreign shore...

We know that for too long humans have lived as if we are separate isolated beings, betraying the irrefutable fact of our interdependence with all people, all things, and the living system from which we emerged, upon which we depend, to whom we are responsible...Earth – our blue boat home - our common home.

Many are estranged from Life itself and this estrangement has made us sick and it is killing us.

It has made us, humans and otherwise, sick in body, and the poorest and most vulnerable people suffer the greatest from the effects of the degradation and despoliation of the earth...

This estrangement has made us sick in our souls – It causes soul sickness to live split from the source of that which gives us Life...

Sick souls can’t shine...

To place a death-dealing economic system above the living system of Earth, and the living beings upon it, betrays the sacred trust of our species to care for Life ...

The Earth’s systems, the earth’s species, and our very souls - Everything is connected, everything is at stake.

Tomas's words, "Pastora everything is at risk so I am willing to risk everything," raises a challenge...what are we willing to risk?

What am *I* willing to risk? Am I willing to risk my comfort? My way of life? My body? Am I willing to risk everything?

Am I willing to risk my privilege?

For along side of, or rather in, a racist society, bound up with the degradation of the earth is the denigration of black bodies, and it is here that Life calls me to risk my white privilege, to unremittingly affirm that black lives – black bodies – matter. To counter the defensive response – all lives matter, with the facts of existence for black bodies.

In his poetic and powerful book, *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates writes to his son about death and the disregard of black bodies upon which the trope of race has been drawn and plays out the fears and hatred of white supremacy.

I give you Coates words:

"I write you in your 15th year. I am writing you because this was the year you saw Eric Garner choked to death for selling cigarettes; because you know now that Renisha McBride was shot for seeking help, that John Crawford was shot down for browsing in a department store. And you have seen men in uniform drive by and murder Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old child whom they were oath-bound to protect.

And you know now, if you did not before, that the police departments of your country have been endowed with the authority to destroy your body. It does not matter if the destruction is the result of an unfortunate overreaction. It does not matter if it originates in a misunderstanding. It does not matter if the destruction springs from a foolish policy. Sell cigarettes without the proper authority and your body can be destroyed. Turn into a dark stairwell and your body can be destroyed.

...all our phrasing—*race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy*—serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. You must never look away from this. You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body.”

Friends, we must never look away. We must all remember. Bodies count. Everything is connected. Everything is at stake.

And yet I know - along with all that thwarts life, there is a higher love inspiring so many shining souls to risk bringing about a life-affirming, life-sustaining, life-flourishing world.

Every breath you take with the consciousness that you are part of the web of life is you showing up – you were made for these times...

...calling forward a movement gaining momentum, creating discomfort – oh yes, but also solidarity, siblings struggling together, co-creating communities of resistance, resilience, and transformation.

Pinkola reminds us: “We know that it does not take "everyone on Earth" to bring justice and peace, but only a small, determined group who will not give up during the first, second, or hundredth gale.”

All shining souls on deck

Activist Bo Diego, wrote:

“My hope is that in the course of smaller struggles ordinary people will develop the organizational capacity and consciousness needed to ultimately transform society for the benefit of the vast global majority. My hope is that the many wonderful capacities people already display in a society that is certainly not organized to reward them can propel us toward a different way of life. It’s not a sure thing – it’s a tragic hope, but an active hope.”

So we see with new eyes what was always there for us to see...

Loving the world – grounded in spiritual practice, nurturing communities of solidarity, resistance, and beauty – we must become hospice workers and midwives - saving what can be saved, holding with tender love all we will lose, and birthing a wholly new humanity. To live from love, not fear, with an eyes-wide-open hope, with fierce compassion and with joy.

This is the great challenge of our time - of all time - for the human species – this is our evolutionary imperative.

We were made for these times.

And we are not alone - there is that in Life – a higher love - that calls forth love and impulses to justice even in the midst of fear, hatred, or devastation...Inspiring us to act boldly and bravely...

There is that in life – a higher love - that lures us to imagine creative possibilities for what might arise in us and around us...

We are hope, walking, rising, standing - in spirit or in body - to show our shining souls.