

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 1<sup>ST</sup>, 2021

**“A little girl in my mom’s neighborhood has a very old dog with severe arthritis. Today I saw her gently strap him into a baby stroller and wait for the UPS truck so they could chase after it, running and laughing as the pup barked wildly. You know, just in case you forgot what love means.”**



Dear Ones,

It’s time for our annual celebration of the Blessing of the Animals! In pre-COVID times, this was the long-awaited Sunday when our animal companions would join us at church. In the past year and a half, they’ve been there reliably every Sunday, and we’ve enjoyed regular sightings in the Zoom room — most notably, their tails. This is a special pandemic Sunday: We’ll be featuring them (or photos ... and stuffies!) in our Hollywood Squares as we give thanks for their often healing and sometimes hilarious presence in our lives.

Yulia Yun opens the service on piano, playing movements from Poulenc's *Les Animaux Modèles* (The Model Animals), including *The Bear and the Travelers*, *The Ant and the Grasshopper* (which, in French, is *La Fourmi*), and *The Lion in Love*. Director of Music Mark David Buckles (guitar) and Julie Metcalf (violin) sing Richard Bruxvoort Colligan's *All of Us Belong*; it says

All of us belong  
Each and every one  
All of us belong  
In this sacred circle

We have wings  
and paws  
and tails  
and toes  
and instincts  
and souls.

Our own Rev. Joanna Lubkin, on her Sunday off from Theodore Parker Church in West Roxbury, where she is serving as interim minister, leads us in *We Celebrate the Web of Life* and has a wonderful surprise for us. Mark David also has a surprise: Our anthem, *With Animals*, with text from Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*, is a world premiere, which he composed!

When Mark David and Julie play Ariel Friedman's *Turtle in the Grass* and our perennial favorite, Charlie Boyd Acuff's *Old Yeller Dog Came Trottin' through the Meetinghouse*, it's time for our virtual Animal Promenade! If Tech Team lead Art Nava can see an animal in your square, he'll be spotlighting you (think Fenway Park's jumbotron)! We'll all sing *How Sweet It Is* (Marvin Gaye, James Taylor, and so many others), and close with text attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi: *All Creatures of the Earth and Sky* — Alleluia! The service closes with Yulia Yun on organ, playing Darius Milhaud's *The Ox on the Roof*. Rev. Beth joins me in the pulpit. My sermon is called Empathy.

Following the service, at 1:30 p.m., we'll reopen the Zoom room, live from the Boston Public Garden. If you're able to come in person (and "in animal"), please meet Rev. Beth and me behind the William Ellery Channing statue (just inside the garden at the corner of Arlington and Boylston streets, directly across from our Great Doors) for a festive promenade around the lagoon!

While at 3.39%, the COVID positivity rate in Boston remains too high (that number excludes higher education) — 2.5% is our close/stay closed number — our reopening team is faithfully beginning to prepare for the time we can safely gather in person/hybrid. Following the lead of our sibling houses of worship and event venues throughout the Commonwealth, we'll be requiring everyone who comes into the church to be masked as well as vaccinated, and ask you to review a "symptom check." For those who cannot be vaccinated or who can't join us in person for other reasons, Matt Malikowski's team is working long hours to ready us for hybrid worship and other gatherings so that the quality of the Zoom experience remains exceptionally high; this week, new speakers were installed. Ágora, our resident Latinx arts hub, has purchased new cameras. We're sharing all our equipment (as well as the costs!) with each other; what a fabulous partnership!

Queen Cheryl is leading up a team who will check people in at the doors and be sure we have everyone's contact information for contact tracing; we're working on a pre-registration form so "regulars" only need to do that once. In a whole new interpretation of prophetic hospitality, they'll be sure we're seated in every other pew, alone or in pods, as we're comfortable. We're printing little signs for the outside of the pew doors that say "This pew is full." When the door is closed, people will know to sit elsewhere.

For any of you desiring to be “device-free” in the sanctuary; we’ll designate an area for that. Many of you have said you’d both love to be in church and to participate in the Zoom room chat with members of the congregation there. I so appreciate that; it will be important to fostering the experience of being one congregation!

What shall we do about orders of service? For many reasons, we’d love not to have to print them at church; we’ve all learned to access them on our devices, or to print them out at home. And being able to continue to include the words to the songs and hymns means we won’t have to move the hymnals every week — because of physical distancing, the sanctuary is the only space that can accommodate many gatherings that are starting up again. Since singing indoors is a super-spreader, our professional musicians will continue to delight us and we’ll have to be content, for now, with humming into our masks.

After the service, we’ll forgo coffee hour. Rev. Beth and I will be out in front, down on the sidewalk, eager to greet you outside in the fresh air. O, and one more thing: For ventilation, all the doors and windows will be open throughout the service. We’ll need to bundle up!

When will all this unfold? We have no earthly idea! But let’s be ready and let’s plan to get it right. That feels like a big challenge, but we’ve figured out everything else this previously unimaginable time has thrown our way ... and we’ve done an astonishingly good job of it! *Courage, my friends!* Courage, and a little more patience. And I will say again .... Given that we have to go through this, I am so grateful to be going through it with you!

*Faithfully yours, with love,  
Kim*



Our own Nate Brown opens the Boston Mayoral Forum: Solutions to Homelessness.  
*Bravo, Nate!*

Please click [here](#) to watch the video.