

**Sunday, February 22nd, 2026**

**Theme: Soothe Your Soul**

**Service Leader: Rev. “Twinkle” Marie Manning**

**Thought for contemplation:**

*“Stay a while, still.  
Less like the wind,  
more like the ground you stand on”*  
- Mary Walker

**Lighting of the Chalice**

We light this chalice as a symbol of faith,  
a beacon of welcome,  
an emblem of trust in each other  
to create sacred space when we come together.  
May its light offer solace;  
its warmth, comfort.

**OPENING WORDS**

**“Walk Lightly”**

by Aldous Huxley

“Maybe it’s feeling dark  
because you are trying too hard.

Lightly child, lightly.

Learn to do everything lightly.

Yes, *feel* lightly  
even though you’re *feeling deeply*.

Just lightly  
let things happen and lightly  
cope with them.”

Ugh....I chose this reading months ago, yet when I first read through it again this week in preparation for our service,

my heart began to reel,  
my *body began to fidget*,  
my *mind began to screech....*

All in absolute rejection of these benign words written by a pacifist and philosopher a decade before I was even born.

“Walk Lightly?”

Sure, he had encountered his fair share atrocities in the world he lived in. But, even his wildest fiction couldn't have prepared him for what our world is embroiled in today.

There is so much pain.  
So much stress.  
So much work to do.

And, just when we think we have a handle on all the grossness and monstrosities plaguing our planet and our communities, Social Media hits “*refresh*” and we are inundated with even more. Daily. Often hourly. Updates about:

So much pain.  
So much stress.  
So much work to do.

“Breathe,” I coached myself, “Breathe.”

“You *chose* this reading for a reason. Reach it.” I thought.

I focused in on the reading once again. Aldous continued with these words:

“I was so preposterously serious in those days...  
Lightly, lightly – it's the best advice ever given me...

So throw away your baggage and go forward.

There are quicksands all about you,  
sucking at your feet,  
trying to suck you down into  
fear and self-pity and despair.  
That's why you must walk *so lightly*. Lightly my darling...

That's why you must walk *so lightly*. Lightly my darling...”

Ok. .... OK...

We will give it a try.

Today's service - at least initially - it strives to be a pause.  
I envisioned guiding you through an extended meditation.  
The kind that you just sink through the floor.

I know some of you really appreciate those.  
A pause from the stress outside these doors.  
And, to the extent possible,  
a pause to the stress  
so often held tightly  
inside our hearts and minds.

*A pause to Soothe Our Souls.*

In the end, I failed that intention...or at least it's not fully a Pause. It is more of a *Balancing* I present to you today.

But, as any good caregiver does, I brought *soothing Gifts*.  
Sensory items to offer a measure of soothing.  
Old school ones...play dough, bubbles, tiny Rubik's cubes,  
as well as sensory push pop bracelets, stickers and more.

Children can choose first as they come up for their Story.

## **Reading:**

### **“Myself”**

by Edgar Albert Guest

I have to live with myself and so  
I want to be fit for myself to know.

I want to be able as days go by,  
always to look myself straight in the eye;

I don't want to stand with the setting sun  
and hate myself for the things I have done.

I don't want to keep on a closet shelf  
a lot of secrets about myself

and fool myself as I come and go  
into thinking no one else will ever know  
the kind of person I really am,

I don't want to dress up myself in sham.  
I want to go out with my head erect  
I want to deserve everyone's respect;

but here in the struggle for fame and wealth  
I want to be able to like myself.

I don't want to look at myself and know that  
I am bluster and bluff and empty show.

I never can hide myself from me;  
I see what others may never see;

I know what others may never know,  
I never can fool myself and so,  
                  whatever happens           I want to be  
                  self respecting and conscience free.

### **MESSAGE: "Soothe Your Soul"**

A couple weeks ago I came across an article by Dr. Jennifer Freed talking about  
**"The Epstein Class."**

Not to describe a social stratum, but a *pathology of conscience*.

A precursor for which is what is called "**Catastrophic Wealth.**"

An idea popularized by Naomi Klein with her phrasing of "Disaster Capitalism" in  
her 2007 book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. Reiterated  
by Edgar Villanueva in his 2018 book entitled, *Decolonizing Wealth* and  
discussed more thoroughly by him and Marjorie Kelly in her 2023 book: *Wealth  
Supremacy*.

Each describing the moral, social, and economic consequences of the extreme  
wealth gap, also referred to as "catastrophic wealth imbalance."

"Catastrophic Wealth" - not merely "an abundance of money" but wealth so vast  
that it far exceeds any conceivable human need.

It surpasses the resources of entire nations, let alone communities, or ordinary families.

Wealth so vast that it no longer functions as providing comfort or even security. It becomes an addictive substance.

In and of itself.

And, as with any addiction, it succumbs to familiar patterns:

- Tolerance develops (more is never enough)
- Empathy erodes (others become instruments)
- Boundaries collapse (rules feel optional)
- Consequences seem unreal

As Dr. Jennifer Freed puts it:

"The pursuit of more — more access, more dominance, more indulgence — becomes primary. Everything else, including human beings, becomes expendable.

When catastrophic wealth fuses with *social impunity*, a distinctive syndrome appears.

Its core belief is simple: *I am so exceptional that laws, limits, and other people's humanity do not apply to me.*

This is not merely arrogance.

It is a moral dissociation — a *progressive detachment* from ordinary ethical reality.

Like all addictions, it worsens over time.

What begins as entitlement becomes *exploitation*.

What begins as indulgence becomes *violation*.

What begins as secrecy becomes *systemic harm*.

History shows that when power is unchecked long enough, the unspeakable becomes normalized inside elite circles.

Silence becomes *loyalty*.

Complicity becomes *currency*.

## Symptoms of the Epstein Class

We can recognize this syndrome by recurring patterns:

**1. More is always better.**

Sufficiency is inconceivable. Excess is identity.

**2. People are replaceable.**

Relationships are transactional; loyalty flows *upward only*.

**3. The world is consumable.**

Environments, institutions, and bodies exist for extraction.

**4. Deception is strategy.**

Lying, cheating, and concealment are operational tools, not moral breaches.

**5. Getting away with it is intoxicating.**

Impunity itself becomes a psychological high.

**6. Contempt for those outside the class.**

Ordinary people are viewed as naïve, inferior, or irrelevant.

**7. Access to others' bodies is entitlement.**

Sexual access becomes a status marker rather than a mutual act.

**8. Justice feels optional.**

Consequences are assumed to be avoidable through influence or wealth.”

Never before has this been more evident. Our social media and news outlets remind us of this every minute of every day.

It's so unjust.

It's so exhausting.

And the reality is so morally objectionable, that it continues to exist is wearing us all down.

And these atrocities exist within a world of other clear and present dangers, not the least is Climate Insecurity, Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, ICE in our communities and more.

I've been feeling the exhaustion in my bones lately.

The past couple weeks I have been feeling *really* tired.  
I got a cold - first one in many years.  
So I rested a lot, slept a lot, and, listened to a lot of YouTube videos.

American Idol  
X-Factor  
The Voice  
America's Got Talent  
Britain's Got Talent  
Ireland's Got Talent  
Canada's Got Talent  
*If it had a **Golden Buzzer**, I listened to it this week :)*

It was so cathartic.  
I went through a whole Kleenex box of tissues  
So moved by the music  
By the stories people brought with them to the stage.

Singing for people with them;  
for people who had died,  
but ever are remembered.

Two people wrote songs for people they'd never met but were inspired by their all-too-brief lives.

One of those was written by a teenager about another teen  
- a 13 year old girl who'd  
ended her young life in what we call suicide.  
She did so because of the pain  
she was in from *relentless bullying*.

This other young girl - the songwriter - experienced similar and wrote a song for courage and to honor this girl she did not know so that her memory would live on. So that her mother would have some measure of comfort.

I cried and cried and cried.

There were many performances about surviving bullying.  
There were many songs about surviving struggles.  
There were songs of resilience and hope and love and second chances.

After going down rabbit hole after rabbit hole chasing these **Golden Buzzer** experiences I began to notice that more and more Amazing performances were being suggested in the side screen on my computer.

So I continued to click video after video.  
It was emotional.  
But I began to feel lighter; more hopeful.

Rather than being prompted in the side screen to click about urgent news and *political updates*, what was being suggested was row after row of uplifting music and dance performances.

Alot of them were poignant.  
Many were exhilarating.  
It was lovely to immerse for a while as I granted myself permission to rest.

And, as I began to feel better,  
I even began to dance with the videos.

Then, the algorithm seemed to get bored with my happiness.  
Or, perhaps it was a test - and, I *failed*.

Amid my beautiful realigned queue of music and performances,  
Youtube announced to me in **Big Captions:**  
**“Prince Andrew Arrested for Ties with Epstein.”**

“Really? REALLY?” I thought to myself,

“Someone in that echelon is *finally* going to be held accountable for sex trafficking and assault! Finally! Finally.”

So, I clicked.  
And, discovered that - no.  
*Nope.*

The investigation focuses on allegations that Prince Andrew passed confidential government information to Jeffrey Epstein.

And for that, British authorities seek to hold him accountable.

I wonder how victims of Al Capone felt back in the day. They must have been upset that he was never really held accountable for his violent crimes. Did they feel any justice was served at all by his brief incarceration for white collar crimes? And, there's dozens more like them.

Will the powers that be today simply let the clock run down on the statute of limitations for the human trafficking and sexual assaults? Things so vile that we can hardly conceive they exist in our world. Sometimes to people we know, people in our communities. There's a statute of limitations on them. It's crazy. Dr. Jennifer Freed informs us regarding what she calls, "The Social Ecology of Impunity" essentially that:

No such class operates alone. It is sustained by an ecosystem. And that ecosystem is well supported:

- Institutions that bow to wealth.
- Gatekeepers who exchange silence for access.
- Legal systems that slow to a crawl when power is involved.
- Deferring to them rather than protecting the victims.
- Cultural myths persist that confuse affluence with virtue.

When wealth amasses to catastrophic proportions, accountability evaporates.

The outcome is not surprising:  
Those harmed are left without remedy,  
and those responsible move forward without constraint.

What is done to victims — the harm endured - is profound and lifelong. Indeed, the suffering carved into the lives of victims, echoes for generations.

And it ripples out to all of us as **Moral Injury**. To everyone who has an ounce of empathy in them. And that is Every One Of You!

Because when the powerful perpetually evade consequence,  
when influence outruns truth, when wealth becomes a safety net against justice:

- Faith in justice disappears.
- Civic trust hardens into cynicism.
- Those harmed are forced into silence.
- Those who witness, shrink away from conflict.

The presiding message states:  
Some lives are negotiable.  
Some lives are expendable.  
Some lives simply matter less.  
Normalize silence.  
Do Not disrupt the status quo.

And for those who witness the harm, as we all do via mechanisms of social media and news outlets, a quiet fracture spreads. It is identified as a “*corrosion of shared moral reality.*”

It is so painful to witness. For the morally and ethically sound, it becomes suffocating under the weight and witness of this.

Identifying this corruption is the beginning step of correcting course. We’ve named the syndrome, this *Epstein Class* whose *catastrophic wealth* provides them with unchecked privilege. We cannot let this cultural hegemony continue to continue.

We know it is incompatible with wellbeing. We innately know that Healthy Societies ensure:

- Accountability that binds — without exception, without exemption.
- A culture that untangles wealth from moral authority.
- Structures that shield the vulnerable rather than the powerful.
- A shared ethic of sufficiency in place of endless accumulation by the elite.
- That true democracy is present as decisions and power are not placed solely in the hands of oligarchs.

Organizations are emerging to take the lead in shifting the tides towards justice.

Ie: Edgar Villanueva’s *Decolonizing Wealth Project* - specifically their “Moonshot” initiative that aims to unlock *One Trillion Dollars* through reparative giving over the next ten years, increasing the flow of resources toward economic solidarity, climate and land justice, and wellbeing—because these are the pathways to a liberated world.

Ie: *Resource Generation*, a nonprofit that organizes young people (ages 18-35) with access to wealth and class privilege in the U.S. to become transformative leaders working towards the equitable distribution of wealth, land and power.

Ie: *Indivisible*, a nationwide movement comprised of millions of people working to stop the rise of authoritarianism in the United States and to demand a real democracy.

We know there is much work to do to shape ours into a Healthy Society.  
And, we are willing to do the work. Often, tirelessly and to our exhaustion.

Recognizing that we are ourselves are experiencing Moral Injury is an important part in this healing process.

We cannot let ourselves succumb to the exhaustion that is pressed on us in a vacuum of PTSD-inducing Moral Injury. Every time we open up our chosen social media and news outlets it is triggered again and again.

Before we reach the point of exhaustion:

We must take time to rest.

We must pause the algorithm so we can catch our breaths.

We must seek out the good of the world - so that we can wear it as armor and shield and a reminder of what we are fighting for and praying for.

Even as we educate ourselves how to mobilize and assist those most in need. We must find ways to cloak ourselves in love, in grace, in gratitude for the *wealth of goodness* that also exists in our world.

Some of us will find that in the music we listen to, or the art we create.  
Some of us will find it exploring nature, or visiting with friends and loved ones.  
Some of us will find it in moments of stillness and silence.  
Sometimes it is as simple as rolling play dough or blowing bubbles or solving that mysterious Rubik's cube (*that my youngest son can solve in 15 seconds flat*).  
For some it is knitting and sewing.

Even just long enough to disrupt the stressful algorithms and experience measures of peace.

Whatever you do. Be open to find it.  
Because it is always there.  
Waiting to be discovered.  
Waiting for you to pause and soothe your soul.

And sometimes, *sometimes*, it comes with a **Golden Buzzer!**

May it be so.

## **Closing Words**

### **“Still”**

*by Mary Walker*

*((She is a poet, writer and creator who resides in New Zealand))*

Stay a while, still.

Less like the wind,  
more like the ground you stand on.

Where are you going anyway?  
and what for? and must you?

This world that we live in moves  
only as needed—

toward nourishment  
toward light  
toward life.

Save yourself for things that matter.

### **Extinguishing the Chalice**

We extinguish our chalice  
yet carry with us the light of peace.

Peace in our hearts;  
Peace in our minds;  
Peace in our words;  
Peace in our actions;  
Peace to share as we go out in the world.

### **Unison Benediction**

*Let us go remembering to praise,  
to live in the moment,  
to love mightily,  
to bow to the mystery.*