



all been reminded of its presence with more frequency, just about every day. This was a reality we faced late last year, and so we do again late in this year.

Also, toward the end of last year, we began to see many glimmers of hope toward ending the crisis of the pandemic, and this year has allowed us to witness *parts* of that hope bearing fruit. Most of us here are walking participants in the efforts to contain the pandemic and effectively reducing the risks that come with it.

These realities co-exist.

In addition to the losses that we have named today, we are also paying our respects to the many deaths we know about around the world. As of this morning, the death count from Covid-19 is about to cross the threshold into 5 million deaths. That's 5 million *confirmed* deaths... it is estimated that the true total is already much higher than that. With similar grimness, it is likely that, this coming month, the total *confirmed* number of cases will surpass a quarter of a billion.

Alongside these realities, we can also express gratitude to the many souls who have given of their lives, and sometimes their very lives, in the work of taking care of us and those we love. The healthcare workers, the care staff, the scientists, the retail and grocery workers, the first responders, and too many people and professions to name. Some of them died doing what they love, others continue, sometimes wondering if they still love what they do. All of them offering and having had offered essential service. And for that we are grateful.

Just as the tally of deaths and infections are nearing grim thresholds, there *are* other inspiring thresholds we are facing. Within the next few days, total doses of vaccines are on track to surpass 7 billion. Of course, due to the multiple required doses of many vaccines, the total vaccination rate is lower – still, this coming week, we are likely to see that half of the world's population has received at least one dose, and

already, significantly more than a third of the world population has been fully vaccinated.

These are both encouraging and disappointing numbers. It is incredible that we have reached those levels of immunization over the past year – many authorities doubted it would be possible to even *begin* that process by this time of this year. And still, the numbers are not quite where they need to be to really offer the protection needed for everyone to be safe, particularly many who remain among the most vulnerable populations to begin with.

My friends all these realities can coexist, and we can acknowledge them together.

My friends, today we sit with lamentation, we are open to celebration, and we offer our gratitude.

My friends, today we live with these realities, and we honour them together.

So may it be,  
In Solidarity, in love, in faith,

Amen

*Suggested Hymns:*

**Opening Hymn #128 For All That Is Our Life**

~)| Words: Bruce Findlow, 1922-

Music: Patrick L. Rickey, 1964- , © 1992 UUA

SHERMAN ISLAND

**Opening Hymn #322 Thanks Be for These**

~)| Words: Richard Seward Gilbert, 1936- , and

~)| Joyce Timmerman Gilbert, 1936 , © 1992 Unitarian Universalist Association

Music: Hungarian Melody, 16<sup>th</sup> cent.,

~)| arr. by Robert L. Sanders, 1906-

TRANSYLVANIA

**Closing Hymn #411 Part in Peace**

~)| Words: Sarah Flower Adams

Music: From *The Southern Harmony*, 1825, harmony by Alastair Cassels-Brown, b. 1927, © 1982 The Church Pension Fund

CHARLESTON