

Prelude

Welcome/Intros of Leaders/Details

Invocation/Short Prayer/Quote ~

First Hymn ~ 243 Love Will Guide Us

Readings ~

Joys and Concerns

Interlude

Message:

Unprogrammed Worship

Second Hymn ~315 Give Yourself to Love

Final Quote

Afterthoughts, Introductions, Announcements

Postlude

Musical prelude at 10:00 am

Silent pause for late arrivals to enter

Welcome everyone, briefly introduce yourself

Short prayer or Quote

They/Them by David Gate

(dedicated to Nex Benedict)

If God created night & day
& dawn, of course
& dusk
& the tangerine rosepink sunset
& the deep amethyst twilight
& the infant bright of morning

Then to perceive the world in binary
is to forgo knowledge of the divine.

First Hymn- 243 Love Will Guide Us

Joys and Concerns:

Readings:

For When People Ask

Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

I want a word that means
okay and not okay,
more than that: a word that means
devastated and stunned with joy.
I want the word that says
I feel it all all at once.
The heart is not like a songbird
singing only one note at a time,

more like a Tuvan throat singer
able to sing both a drone
and simultaneously
two or three harmonics high above it—
a sound, the Tuvans say,
that gives the impression
of wind swirling among rocks.
The heart understands swirl,
how the churning of opposite feelings
weaves through us like an insistent breeze,
leads us wordlessly deeper into ourselves,
blesses us with paradox
so we might walk more openly
into this world so rife with devastation,
this world so ripe with joy.

Reasons to Live Through the Apocalypse by Nikita Gill

Sunrises. People you have still to meet and laugh with. Songs about love, peace, anger, and revolution. Walks in the woods. The smile you exchange with a stranger when you experience beauty accidentally together. Butterflies. Seeing your grandparents again. The moon in all her forms, whether half or full. Dogs. Birthdays and half-birthdays. That feeling of floating in love. Watching birds eat from bird feeders. The waves of happiness that follow the end of sadness. Brown eyes. Watching a boat cross an empty sea. Sunsets. Dipping your feet in the river. Balconies. Cake. The wind in your face when you roll the car window down on an open highway. Falling asleep to the sound of a steady heartbeat. Warm cups of tea on cold days. Hugs. Night skies. Art museums. Books filled with everything you do not yet know. Long conversations. Long-lost friends. Poetry.

~ from *Where Hope Comes From* (Hachette Books 2021)

May we raise children who love the unloved things **by Nicolette Sowder**

May we raise children
who love the unloved things – the dandelion, the
worms & spiderlings.

Children who sense
the rose needs the thorn
& run into rainswept days
the same way they turn towards sun...

And when they're grown &
someone has to speak for those
who have no voice
may they draw upon that
wilder bond, those days of
tending tender things
and be the ones."

Message:

Today I am 32 weeks pregnant. My due date is October 25th, which feels far away when I consider my stretching skin and wonder how much bigger I can possibly grow, and it also feels right around the corner, especially when I contemplate our long to-do list full of preparations that need to happen before the baby arrives.

Pregnancy and what I have experienced of parenthood so far, seems to be an experience of feeling many things at once. Pregnancy is one of the best things that I have ever experienced, it is something that we wished for and worked for and wanted for years, and it has also been difficult and has caused nausea, throwing up, and intense body pain. The last few weeks have been better physically, but have been a roller-coaster emotionally. Both Indigo and I are very excited about this baby coming, and also nervous and anxious! I love feeling the baby kick and move, and I also wish they would stop pressing on my bladder.

One of the things that is challenging about impending parenthood is my grief about climate change and the current political state of the world. I know I frequently talk about grief—and this is another form of it. Grief for the world that was, the world that is, and the world that might or might not be.

I remember first feeling this loss when I was a kid and my elderly neighbor who was born in 1919 talked to me about his boyhood on the Chesapeake Bay. When he was young, the water was clear 10 feet down, and he would jump in off the docks and pick crabs off the pilings. He said they would have so many crabs that

they shared them with all their neighbors. (Like zuccinis in August around here). I was sad that I would not experience the clear waters that he had known as a child, or the abundance of wild-life that lived in the Bay in the early 20th century. While the Chesapeake has recovered in some ways—there are re-established oyster bars, recovering aquatic forests and the crab population is stable, the ecosystem continues to struggle. Right now, the osprey population is plummeting due to over-fishing.

I have felt climate grief many times again this summer—when the sky was orange from Canadian wild-fires, when friends were evacuating themselves, their child, and their six cats from their house in Spokane (thankfully their house survived the fires), and most recently while watching footage of the Nepalese floods. The floods have felt particularly devastating not only in terms of scale, but also because they were caused by a melting glacier, one of the many glaciers melting around the world.

Indigo and I have talked over and over about the ethics of bringing a child into this burning world, and the topic of climate change feels particularly heavy now that our child is real and not hypothetical.

When we had unprogrammed worship in the garden in July, Tony reflected on his age and the lifespans of trees. I spoke up and noted that if our little one lives as long as Tony has, that they will see the year 2110. That feels both wondrous and impossible; I am scared to contemplate what the world will look like in 84 years: how hot the summers will be, how much CO₂ will be in the atmosphere, how many species will have been lost.

It is easy to fall into despair when thinking about all that is going on in the world. And I have heard Friends ask many times over the last two years, “What do we do? What can I do?”

I know that this is a theme that has been touched on by other Speakers too, and there is no one answer to how each of us should meet this moment. For some, letting go of attachment, and stepping away from the news is an important way to address anxiety spirals. For others, stories of past activism are inspiring and provide a road-map for action today. For many, trust and faith in a higher power brings comfort on dark days. And we all gather comfort from connection, whether casual or continual.

For me, I continually return to the idea that we need to let go of binary thinking, something I have explored in many of my Teachings over the past two years. I have reflected on the joy and grief related to my experience at Wells College, as well as personal losses I have experienced. I have talked about the contradictions and nuances in my own personal life in regards to atheism and spirituality, the false dichotomy of science/religion, and the challenge of holding onto hope while facing a devastating political reality. Ultimately, I think that navigating this current moment means holding onto grief and joy together, alongside hope and despair. Both/And, not either/or.

As Rosemerry Watola Trommer writes in the poem I shared earlier,

“The heart understands swirl,
how the churning of opposite feelings
weaves through us like an insistent breeze
leads us wordlessly deeper into ourselves,
blesses us with paradox
so we might walk more openly
into this world so rife with devastation,
this world so ripe with joy.”

Having a baby right now means grieving that my child will be growing up in a different world than I did. I know that is the case for every generation—but it feels particularly difficult when it is not clear that the future will be a better one.

(As an aside: this is perhaps a eurocentric 1st world view, I know many communities have experienced and are experiencing apocalypse already. Like with the genocide of Native Americans during colonization. Also, progress is not linear, the past is not all bad, the future is not all good. When I lived in Massachusetts I attended an intergenerational Rainbow Supper club at a local senior center. My friend and I went and met 4 lesbians in their 80s. Two couples, who had been friends for decades. They remarked with sadness on the fact that they didn't have children because that wasn't possible in their day, but then also told us that they felt bad for young lgbtq people today because all the gay bars have closed, and they had such a fantastic time in those bars, and met so many friends and built community).

So, progress is not linear, but when I see so many scenes of devastation around the world—I worry that I made a mistake about creating this human life.

On the other hand—having a baby right now means holding onto hope that the future could be better, that we can shape the world into something where we and our descendants and all the living beings around us could thrive.

—And I want to note here that I am not thinking about hope in terms of just “thoughts and prayers” but as something active/requiring action. I love Emily Dickinson’s poem “hope is the thing with feathers” but I also really love a poem in response to hers, called “Hope is not a bird, Emily, it is a sewer rat.” —

Indigenous scholars like Robin Wall Kimmerer and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson remind us that within Potowami and Nishnaabeg culture, humans are not seen as separate from nature. Unlike western cultures that see humans as distinct from, and superior to animals, indigenous teachings tell us that all living beings are kin. And that humans can have a positive role rather than a destructive one in shaping the ecosystems around us.

Having a baby means that I am even more committed to doing everything I can to make a better future for this child, and others. I may not be able to enact change on a global scale, but I am doing what I can on a local level. For example, I want my child to be able to experience the joy of watching fireflies in the summer, and I am doing everything I can on our little plot of land to help the fireflies survive and to keep that summer magic alive. I want to teach my child to notice and care about the world around them, to grow up to “tend to tender things” as the Sowder poem says.

I feel very fortunate that our child will be born into a very loving community, where they will have many examples of what it means to tend to others, whether those folks are members of our congregation, or migrant farmworkers, or people struggling with homelessness or the creatures in the ecosystems around us. I know that not all parents are lucky enough to feel as supported as we have in the last 7 months. We have been gifted so many hand-me downs and baby items that we have barely had to buy anything and we have been supported by friends far and near who have helped us re-organize the house and set up nursery items. At the farmer’s market earlier this summer, one of the vendors, who is also a dear

friend handed us a free zucchini (the first of the season) and said, “here, this is for the community baby.”

Community, alongside joy and hope, is my other antidote to despair in these times. I may not be able to change the entire world—but again, I can focus on local connections. I can help my neighbor’s kid feel loved by setting up my porch as a play space for her, I can help a friend by picking up something from Facebook market place, I can help friends in their gardens, and donate to the food pantry. I appreciate that in turn, we are supported by neighbors and friends who have helped us financially after Wells closed, helped us chop up tree branches and take care of our garden, and take Pippin out for walks while we are at work.

One of the reasons that I love Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, is that it offers an example of the importance of building relationships to survive difficult times. It can be hard to trust others, and it requires vulnerability, but together, we are stronger.

In the poem by Nikita Gill that I read at the start of Meeting, she lists all the reasons to live through the apocalypse. “Sunrises. People you have still to meet and laugh with. Songs about love, peace, anger, and revolution. Walks in the woods. The smile you exchange with a stranger when you experience beauty accidentally together. Butterflies.” Even in dark times there is wonder.

Having a child in these times (perhaps in all times) means grief, and hope, and wonder. I am excited to share the world with our child, and for the opportunity to see the world through their eyes as well. Together, as a family, and as a community, we will navigate whatever the future may bring.

Second Hymn: 315 Give Yourself to Love

Final Quote:

In the Meantime by Tom Hiron

Meanwhile, flowers still bloom.
The moon rises, and the sun.
Babies smile and somewhere,
Against all the odds,
Two people are falling in love.

Strangers share cigarettes and jokes.
Light plays on the surface of water.
Grace occurs on unlikely streets
And we hold each other fast
Against entropy, the fires and the flood.

Life leans towards living
And, while death claims all things at the end,
There were such precious times between,
In which everything was radiant
And we loved, again, this world.

Afterthoughts, Introductions, Announcements