

Prelude**Welcome, Announcements and Greetings – USHERS!****Introit*****Opening Words:**

*Let us begin by joining together and saying responsively the words printed
In the Order of Service:*

Please rise as you are able and join in singing our Opening Hymn:

Opening Hymn: #**Chalice Lighting**

*And now, as _____ lights our chalice let us say together our
affirmation.*

Both are expressions of our life and faith here in this congregation.

***Affirmation**

Love is the Spirit of this Church,

and Service is its law.

This is our great covenant:

To dwell together in peace

To seek truth in love,

And to help one another.

***Doxology**

From all the dwell below the skies

Let songs of hope and faith arise;

Let peace, goodwill on earth be sung

Through every land, by every tongue. Amen.

Message for All Ages**Invitation to Silent and Spoken Prayer -**

And from this time of listening and hearing,

And from a morning that may have already been filled with too much activity,

From a week that may have left you little time to breath,

Or few moments for thought and feeling,

Let me invite you now, in these next few moments, to find a center in the midst

Of the turning world and the many pressures of life

And enter a spirit of meditation and prayer.

Song:**Prayer Cards:**

Loved ones:

World: Folks in North Andover and on Carolina coast

Thanksgiving:

Meditation Interlude

Reading

Our reading this morning is from poet Brian Doyle; it is called “Prayer for Sunday Morning”

Well, first that another came around; thank you for letting me breath another day.

And thanks for the scrap of sunlight, finally, after a straight week, no kidding, of rain and mist and adamant cloud cover, but who’s complaining?

And thanks for the shaggy lazy peace of Sunday morning,

And the obese newspaper, and the way you can stay in your bathrobe,

And the way bacon is allowed, and the way people shuffle into the kitchen

Yawning and happy, and the way there’s no agenda except

A vague shower schedule so as to make the morning worship service.

And thanks for that service, which can be pro forma and dull and formal

And check-the-box, but most of the time isn’t, most of the time its warm

And funny and populous and communal, and sometimes even moving,

And there are always babies and dogs,

And you sit in the back under the glowing windows and remember the

Church isn’t a huge corporation as much as it is a vast amalgam of small

Villages in which people hold hands against the dark and believe in the

Unbelievable.

Isn’t that wild and cool?

Well, you knew that.

But I am just saying thanks, this morning after coffee, and before I get

The last shower, which is reserved for Dad, because he can stand

The cold water best, I guess. And so: Amen.

Morning Offering and Anthem

Offertory Thanks

We give thanks for the gifts and the givers to our community,
for the music,

and for the flowers given by _____ in honor of _____.

May we use what life has given us for things that transcend ourselves

And our own needs, our own wants,

because it is in giving that we receive,

and it is being generous that we learn to grow.

“Sometimes Faith Needs a Running Start”

“Here is the world; beautiful and terrible things will happen.

Keep our hearts tender.

Keep our eyes soft.

Keep our words true.

Because this is what we are about:

We know there is no answer but to love one another.

We bear witness against unnecessary destruction.

We gather in community to practice being the person

We say we want to be.

We cannot do everything,

But we can do something, and that something is not nothing.

So forget your perfect offering.

There is a crack in everything

That is how the light gets in.”

Approximately 3068 miles as the big birds of the sky fly

From where we are sitting this morning, on a northeast arc,

There is a mountain, a wee mountain, but still not wee enough

That I can't quite see the treeless top from the trail head where we have

Parked the car.

It is early evening, after 6, but we are north enough that it won't be dark

For hours still,

Or at least that's the assurance William gives me,

William who was named after William Wallace, the Scottish freedom

fighter,

But who prefers to go by the less Braveheart nickname of ‘Willy.’”

“Aye, we’ll be fine and back in time for our tea and tippie (that’s dinner and beer, in translation). Would a Scotsman lead you wrong?”

Which felt like complicated question and not unlike the complicated questions the times we live in ask of us,

Because the overstimulation of these times (to quote a New Yorker article this summer),

Make us lose track of time; we forget what happened a month ago,

And if we look away for a day, we miss news that that seems momentous

To others – only to be forgotten, too, in a week...

All of us in an endless triathlon of reading, talking, panicking,

Which creates the worst possible frame of mind for answering

Complex questions and finding out what we can have faith in,

What we can put our trust in....

Right?

But let’s not get pulpit poundish just yet, just yet,

As you walk with me up the trail.

Uncommon for the headland range outside Edinburgh at really any time of year,

The sky was clear and blue and deep and the sun was still hovering full

As it prepared to make its arc down the horizon on the western edge,

And it wasn’t long at all, not even 1000ft., before the rock-soil trail

Turned left and up and shared with us the whole journey ahead –

A ribbon of foot-worn earth snaking through rising fields

Of green and blooming heather...up, up, up, up....right into the

Top of blue sky.

Anne Lammot, in the quote I gave us in our programs,
 Says that *the opposite of faith is not doubt...oh no....*
The opposite of faith, she says, is certainty,
Because faith includes noticing the mess, the emptiness, and discomfort,
And letting all that be there until some light returns.
 Which is a great quote, isn't it, yeah, thanks Anne...

Except that when you're starting out on a journey and you don't
 Know how far you have to go, and the times are overstimulating,
 And hurricanes of earth and life bring with them their
 'cones of uncertainty,'
 and undocumented children are still separated from their mommas and
 daddies, despite court orders,
 And maybe you are waiting, as I was at the time,
 Waiting for to find good wifi so you could call home
 And hear what was going with your dad's just diagnosed cancer
 That would take his life only weeks later....

I mean, in the midst of all that it sure is nice to see the path
 Of certainly laid out in front of us, isn't it?
 Every turn and each rise visible to the eye so you can brace yourself
 And take a big deep breath and say to Willy next to you:
'No problem, aye; just a wee hill; we got this.'
 Because while we all know how those motivation posters tell us life is a
 journey and not a destination,
 Can we also admit seeing the destinations is kind of reassuring,

Especially when we know how to get there?

“See there....” Says Willie, pointing up to the right,

At another highland....

“That’s a watchtower. And see out there,”

He says, pointing out, into the distance, at another headland,

‘see that one?’

And see those headlands out there...”

He points, those rimming the edges of the city,

To the towers all along there....

Built, Willy says, *to watch for any threats, and if one person in those towers*

So a threat, they would light a fire,

And then the other would see that fire, and they would light a fire,

And the next one would light a fire,

So that everyone knew to get ready and defend.”

It’s easy to romanticize a place, even a place that sells haggis

In an aluminum can at the airport, which I bought for my son Emerson

As a gift for his 18th birthday,

But it’s easy to romanticize a place and time when you could have faith in

A system that everyone believed in and relied on to give protection

And offer comfort.

And while those days don’t feel completely gone,

It’s also true that our once trusted sources of authority and reliability

Have become splintered and polarized and pundit-ed (is that a word?)

And partisan....

So that whereas once the facts were facts and truth was truth,

And (as Linda Crawford said at a meeting this week),
 Walter Cronkite used to be called the 'most trusted man in America,'
 And people (sometimes horribly falsely in turns out)
 Could trust their priests to protect children,
 And presidents could be trusted not to politicize the death count
 During hurricanes or lower the White House flag to half staff
 After the nation loses a respected senator he happened to disagree with,
 Or even could be trusted to simply be kind,
 And facts were called facts and truth was the truth.
 And Americans agreed on what the watchtowers were and where they
 Were located,

Now...now...its like we have watchtowers everywhere, each of us tending
 To and get warmed by our version of where we want to put our faith in...
 Fox news here, CNN there, Kelly Ann Conway's alternative facts here,
 talking heads there...

Truth isn't truth, says Rudy Giuliani, over there....

I mean, no wonder people look at me crazy like I've got a kilt on in
 downtown Holliston

When I tell them a I'm a minister, a so-called 'person of faith'
 Because, really: what does that even mean? What does faith even mean
 When your life and my life feel uncertain, so 'path-less, so 'uncharted'
 Across these headlands?

Which is the mood I was in when I found the song TNT played for us
 Earlier, asking: *are you feeling fearful brother, are you feeling fearful sister,*
The only way to lose that fearful feeling, replace it with love

That's healing, leave what's heavy behind."

After an hour and 15min we made it to the peak,
The wind coming fierce and fierce into our faces from
The valley below,
Coming from the East,
And me seeing all the way to the horizon,
Beyond which was the sea, beyond which was miles and then Iceland,
And then Maine and then New York and then Lake Erie
And then Ohio and then Illinois and then my dad, there in the middle,
Getting ready, I learned later, to go into hospice.
Because no matter how old you get, or if you become a parent yourself,
Or how complicated the relationship, or how bright or dim their light,
our parents and guardians are always one of your watchtowers, aren't they?

And so I was thinking of him, and I was thinking of his fear,
And mine, too, and holding the heaviness of all that,
And the heaviness of the times that isn't so much a mood as it is it
An accurate, appropriate response to this hyperconnected,
Hypertense, overstimulated, foundations-shaking era...
And wondering what it means to go forward into such open,
Unknow horizon such as this...
With more courage than anxiety,
With more trust than defensive caution,
With more faith than certainty
When Willy taps my shoulder and points down to our left,
About 100 yards down, on a plateau that juts down and then out

Into that horizon, with an edge that leads to nothing but air...
And there, there is a woman and she's forty feet from the edge,
And then she begins to run!
Oh my God!
But its ok, maybe, because in her hands is a bar and over her shoulders
Are the wings of a glider....
And she's running, running, and just as she gets close enough to leap
And a big breath of air push up the nose of her glider and pushes her back,
Nearly on her back....

So she backs up again, undeterred,
And puts herself in her starting position, and seems to stare down the
uncertain horizon, seems to say with her body,
This is just a wee jump...
And then she starts running, running and she gets closer and closer...
But then she rears up, and pushes the nose down and...stops, right on the
Edge, her body seeming to say...are you sure? You trust these wings?
You have faith in this air?

But then she backs up again, more uncertain, but still undeterred...
And puts herself in her starting position,
And stares out into the open horizon and its invisible currents,
Her body seems to say...trust, trust, faith, faith...
And she starts running, running, running and just as she gets closer...
A big breath comes and pushes...underneath the wings and lifts
Her body out into the open, trail-less, uncertain, scary, beautiful,
Wild, empty, turbulent...twilight sky.

Friends, who I love, and I do love you, here's the thing:

I know these new pew cushions are lovely

And very red and maybe even approaching comfortable

By 19th century pew design standards,

And I also know that in these pews we, I hope, find the comfort of a sanctuary and community that holds with love that won't let us down... or let us off.

But even though we may sit back in those cushions, and even lean back,

We are living in a world together and sharing a life together that has us

On the edge of our seats,

seats that might as well be the edge of plateau,

And there is a horizon before us,

and don't know which watchtowers we can trust, and the currents are invisible, and the uncertainty is high,

And we wonder what it will mean to get a running start with our faith...

So that we can leap into whatever is uncertainty is waiting for us... be that the new job, the scary high school lunchroom, the accompaniment of the Undocumented father to court, the white privilege awareness class at church, the retirement, the empty house, the doctor's appointment, the midterm elections, the new relationship, the last visit home to the hospice room to see your parent.

And though I'm uncertain of much, and have more questions than answers,

This I believe;

That on these edges and on these plateau's,

The bars we hold onto are the hands we hold,

And the wings over our backs is the community we create,
And that together we can step back, and get into the starting position
That is this church year together,
And start running, running to that edge...and leap,
Maybe even with just a wee bit of faith....
That the breath of love will carry us through the messy,
turbulent, beautiful, the wild, empty, uncertain horizon
of our lives.
If you don't have faith, let us hold faith for you.
If you don't know trust, let us hold trust for you.
Together let's leave what's heavy behind...and fly.”