

To What and To Whom Do You Turn?

Sermon by Reverend Rebecca M. Bryan

February 26, 2023

The first time I heard the heartbeat of the universe was during a period of intense and prolonged grief. We were moving from our family home where we raised our children and had developed deep ties over decades. I had been grieving for months as we prepared to sell our house and said goodbye to friends. My sadness was confusing to some people as I had instigated the changes that were taking place. Why was I grieving when so much good was happening? I was sure no one wanted to hear more about my grieving. My friends had been amazing in their support. Yet I wondered how much could I ask of them?

On this particular warm spring afternoon, I drove to a nearby monastery. I was feeling melancholy, and this was a place I went for comfort. Pulling into the entrance, I promised myself a trip to their bookstore where I could get lost and distract myself for a bit. Buying the perfect book...surely that would ease the pain.

I walked to the door to find it locked with a sign that read, "Closed. Sorry for the inconvenience." Returning to my car, I folded my arms across the steering wheel, put my head down, and began to sob. A minor inconvenience was all it took to rip my already breaking heart wide open.

My car felt safe. No one would see me. I needed comfort. I needed people and yet I felt like I couldn't reach out for help.

Then something happened that changed me to this day.

As I lay on the steering wheel, I *felt and heard* the heartbeat of the universe. There is no other way to describe it. It was a primordial, deep sound, coming from around me, even though the car was turned off. I stopped crying and let the sound hold me. I sat there for several minutes feeling held and deeply comforted.

I still feel that heartbeat when I drop down and tune in. To me, it is the feminine heartbeat of God, creative, strong, and comforting. Ever present.

Francis Weller writes "Remembering the wisdom

of grief allows us to cultivate faith in a deeper pulse within the soul. Through this we are able to lean into to the world and trust the deeper currents that move through all things."¹

Our monthly ministry theme of grief has clearly struck a chord. I am honored and slightly surprised by how deeply the topic has resonated with so many of you.

I've been moved by your notes and emails sharing your experiences with grief. There is a great group of folks interested in exploring grief together in the yearlong monthly gathering I'm offering called "Interior Landscapes." We will go through Francis Weller's five gates of grief together using a curriculum that includes personal reflection, sharing, and communal ritual. Weller reminds us that we learn to apprentice grief "through meaningful rituals, a community of friends, some time in benevolent solitude, and effective practices that help us stretch into our bigger selves..."² There is still time to join if you email me. Not joining is also good! There is no one way to grieve.

Some of you have shared that you've used the wind phone created by Bettina Turner. It is in the Robing Room behind the pulpit and will remain there for as long as it helpful. I recommend the novel, *The Phone Booth at the Edge of the World*, by Laura Imai Messina if you are drawn to the concept of wind phone. It is well written and remarkably light easy reading, even as it deals with heavy issues. Reading this book this month was like having a companion on the journey.

I hope you are using the journal from our first worship service. Maybe you haven't and will use it at another time, or for another purpose. You may not have even gotten one. It's all good. Trust *your* path and timing.

It has been a sad month for us as a congregation as we mourned the loss of two beloved members, Howard Fairweather and Merryl Maleska Wilbur.

1 Francis Weller, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow* (Berkeley, CA: North Adams Books, 2015), 8.

2 Weller, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*, xxiii.

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Howard's service was beautiful as I know Merryl's will be this Saturday. Your love for Howard and Merryl, their families, and each other is evidence of how important this community is and how we care for one another.

It's also been a difficult month for me personally as I live through the cancer diagnosis of my dear friend. Though things are lifting a bit, we are living through a time of waiting as more tests are done and a treatment plan can be created. My family also feared that my father's cancer had taken a significant turn for the worse a few weeks ago. Thank goodness it hasn't, though we know his days are limited. We are choosing to treasure every day we have together.

It's been hard. And the love of people has been surprising and beautiful. One day last week, I broke down crying while leaving a doctor's office. The woman at the front desk was at first a bit taken aback and then so loving and kind. I wept. She wept with me and offered me a hug. Two days later, I received a handwritten note from her in the mail.

It read in part, know that you are not alone. You have graced me with a rare peek into your life, and I am honored by it. Never forget that you are important, and unexpected people care and are willing to hold a hand when needed.

That is love.

How has your month been? Please know that so many of us care and are here to walk with you, however that may look.

To what and to whom do you turn in challenging times? I turn to my family and friends, my dog, spiritual practices, and nature. I turn to all of you. I turn to community, love, and God as I understand God. I turn to good books, cozy blankets, long swims, and candles burning beside me as I work. I turn and I turn again, till by turning I come round right, as the song says.

So may we turn together.

Amen and blessed be.