

Why We Need Horizons

Sermon by Reverend Rebecca M. Bryan

February 23, 2025

I don't know what it is about February in this place! The winter months here in the east are supposed to be about going inside ourselves by setting aside time to contemplate, read a book, or take a slow walk. I preached a good winter solstice sermon! I talk all about following the rhythms of the seasons and nature and allowing this to be a time of hibernation and preparation. Physician, heal thyself!

This soft and dreamy winter is not what happened here at the FRSUU. So far, 2025 has been busy. CEO busy. Business busy. A few nights ago, I reflected upon the last two months and realized that I spent far too much time in the business part of my ministry. So much so, it disconnected me from my essentials, including loving all of you, having more pastoral visits, dreaming, and planning worship. Those are the things that make me come alive, which then gives me the conviction to do all that must be done to sustain our church: the "business."

I'm sharing this with you to be honest, but also to tell you the costs of what happened. After a few weeks of focusing on all business, I felt I was living largely in my head, which feels different than being in my heart and head. Not all bad by any means, but different, and not my full or true self.

Then we had bad weather, and I experienced pandemic PTSD. I drove to work as snow fell because I couldn't stomach running the church from home again, isolated from all of you. I pulled it together and we had wonderful Zoom services, but I felt the unresolved remnants of our 18 months of online-only worship.

Please understand. I know that being online is a gift. I'm thrilled we have this option. What I was feeling was not really about Zoom or online worship; it was about unresolved grief.

Then, as I tried to write this sermon on Tuesday and Friday and yesterday, I found that I couldn't. The spark wasn't there. The connection to my creativity and wide-open heart had narrowed, and in some ways had become disconnected.

"Just tell us the truth," one of you said to me. "Tell you what," I answered. "That I love you and need you and that without our connection, there is no juice?" The person just smiled at me.

And that's when I realized the cost of disconnecting from what makes our hearts sing. We lose hope. We lose inspiration. Things that aren't really as important begin to feel very important. We are stressed and less kind. We lose our ability to see options and be curious.

When we are disconnected from what brings us joy and passion, we lose our horizons.

A horizon is defined as "the line at which the earth's surface and the sky appear to meet" and "range of vision and field of view."¹ I love the first definition: the line at which earth's surface and the sky appear to meet.

The line or edge between Earth—where we stand—and sky is the place of possibility, creativity, and expansiveness. The land we are inhabiting right now is hurting; its people are frightened, and they show that in their anger or in projection, or they shut down.

We know that trauma creates lack of trust in people and a "sense of foreshortened future."² Consider when you are frustrated or stressed. When this happens we often can't see beyond that day, or sometimes that hour. We feel vulnerable or out of control and become less trusting of our environment and the people in it.

Often the last thing we want to do when we are this stressed or fearful is to reach out. We retreat, pull in, or lash out. Research shows that it is also hard to imagine the future, to be happy, or to be calm. We are hijacked by the survival centers in our brains, which are necessary, but which keep us in stress and/or trauma responses.

We all need a place where we can move out of those responses and into different parts of our brain that enable us to want to connect: with others, with ourselves, and with what makes our

1 <https://wordshake.com/definition/horizons>

2 <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>

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heart sing. We need space and people who allow us to see our horizons, and all that lightens our load, even for a moment or an hour.

I witness this every day. I've watched so many faces light up with interest and joy when we discuss the possibilities for our renovated Parish Hall.

In our horizons we see Parish Hall as a welcoming center in the community, open and affirming to all, a place where connection, joy, and healing can occur. A place where we gather to work for justice and democracy, to help save our planet, her people, and her creatures. As you have told us, we see Parish Hall being a sacred spiritual space, even without a specific religious connotation. We light up when our horizons help us to imagine that space with an addition of an apartment used for temporary housing, and a renovated commercial kitchen that can host community dinners and help us prepare spring breakfasts again. We see this as a space for our own variety shows. You told us that in the horizon you saw Parish Hall as a source of rental income and a place that is affordable to nonprofits, artists, and musicians. A horizon that is a green space in design and usage, and a warm and inviting place to gather.

There are other horizons here at FRS too. We have horizons of music and poetry, friendship, and deep sharing in small groups. Horizons of people who are committed to our values, have different opinions from one another, and care deeply about the same desired outcomes. People like you.

You might be wondering how my sabbatical fits into all of this. Wait, you might be thinking, she needs us and loves us, and she is going to take some time away?

Yes, because connection is more than physical presence; it's a state of the heart. Connection is where we put our focus, and what makes our spirits come alive. Honestly, with a bit less business and a bit more space on sabbatical, I'll be as connected as ever with all of you, and even more so when I return.

And we have a road to travel before then,

anyway, my friends. So much can happen in the next 18 months before the sabbatical. We will plan for some things and respond to others that are unexpected.

Together, connected. What might tear us asunder will instead make us stronger, braver, and more confident in the power of love.

Before I close, I want to invite you to connect with a horizon or two of your own.

Nick will play some music, and we will sit together. Looking at the horizon, allow our hearts and minds to zoom out just a little, or maybe a lot.

What brings you joy? What do you dream of, and what makes you smile? It can be little, or big. Something right after this service, this week, or in an indeterminate period of time.

Come, let us journey together.

May it be so.

Amen and blessed be.