

Are You Willing?

Sermon by Reverend Rebecca M. Bryan

September 7, 2025

I think the spiritual concept of willingness has become grossly misunderstood by some people. The role and power of willingness have been misappropriated (or co-opted) and misapplied: willingness, like some other spiritual concepts, has been taken over by capitalism, self-help, and systems of power.

Willingness has become synonymous with giving up, letting go of one's power, or somehow indicating that we are weak.

There is another way to understand willingness that has been taught by spiritual teachers for thousands of years. You'll read it in the Tao De Ching, Hinduism, and Buddhism in which willingness is a powerful act of co-creation and allowing something new to emerge. Understood this way, willingness can bring us back to center and make space for clarity, calm, and imagination to emerge.

Consider: "Are you willing to accept what is so that you can then choose how to respond?" "Are you willing to ask for help?" "Are you willing to change or to look for possibilities?"

And here this morning, "Are you willing to make space for beauty, restoration, and joy?"

Like many or most of you, I thought a lot about the state of the world and our country this summer. One of the biggest questions I wrestled with was the role of the church—this church—in these times.

I see clearly our need to be engaged in the work of the world; to resist the demise of our democracy, fight for humane and just treatment of all human beings, and do what we can to help allow the Earth to survive and her creatures to thrive.

We will consider all those issues and more next Sunday. Right now, I would like us to reflect upon Sunday mornings. What is our role right now on Sunday mornings? What do people need and what are they coming here looking for?

What can this sacred hour offer to meet (or respond to) the needs of the world including our

own? This is part of the question I grappled with this summer. Clarity began to emerge after much consideration, contemplation, walking by the ocean, and listening to many of you.

I ask you this: *When you consider the role of this church and this space on Sunday mornings, are you willing to allow this space, and this hour, to be a time of healing, beauty, and sacred connection within and beyond yourself? Are you willing to put down the burdens of your life and the world for one hour so that you and others may find their center again—through laughter, music, words, ritual, prayer, and meditation? Are you willing for this to be a sanctuary for your spirit and are you willing to help create that space?*

Start here:

Our role in these times is to meet the needs of the people. It always has been so. I believe that people need hope, respite, and feelings of gratitude, and that people need sanctuary to restore and return to some balance, to laugh, and to be inspired.

Six years ago, it was clear that people wanted justice to be at the center of our Sunday worship, along with caring for one another and growing on our faith journeys. We began using the candles of peace, holding justice Sundays once a month after church, and inviting guests and justice teams to create and lead worship. Allowing this space to be a place of restoration, contemplation, and joy each Sunday morning is part of the work of justice that is needed right now. Love, care, hope, and beauty are also part of justice.

Are you willing to set aside one hour a week to come here and experience love in action? Are you willing to allow this space to be a place of sanctuary for one hour a week and to give yourself to it? Are you willing to laugh, to cry, to share stories, to consider the galaxies? Are you willing to give yourself space to settle, meditate, and pray in the company of others? Are you willing to make this a place of beauty, concern, and space for all people to restore and heal

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whatever is on their minds and hearts?

The Justice Action Council, Pastoral Care Associates, and Worship Associates asked each other these questions at our retreats. "What is the church's role in this sanctuary at this time?" "What do you need from church?" The answers were the same:

Hope

Nature

Joy

Being kind to each other

Meeting and being with people who are also feeling positive during these times

Perspective

Rest

Harmony

Vibration

Community

Transcendent

Each of us experiences those things in different ways. We are diverse in our beliefs and practices, and we delight in sharing them with each other here in worship.

This year, you'll hear some new music and instruments: drums. You'll be invited to participate in music as we did during the gathering music this morning. Each week will be different and yes, the traditional organ, piano, and music will remain.

You'll find sermons that offer the invitation to recalibrate and consider what we need so that we can return to the fight restored and connected to our better selves.

We are not pulling back from our partnerships and justice work. In fact, this work is growing. We will be asking all of you to understand what's happening and how you might support these efforts. I am working with a clergy group in the Boston region through Massachusetts Communities Action Network or MCAN. We are a theologically, racially, and economically diverse group that have committed ourselves to bold

action—to put the voice of diverse religions on the record to say: White Christian Nationalism is not the only voice of religion. You will hear more about this initiative and learn how we as a congregation can get involved if you are interested.

Many of you are doing your own version of this work with your involvement in groups here, in the community, and at the state level.

All of this work matters. It is essential. We cannot stand on the sidelines. Liberal religious communities need to be at the table and part of the collective. And as your pastor and minister, I need to remind us that we also need to care for our bodies, minds, and heart.

People, and the world, need beauty, arts, and meditation.

We need to know there is a place where we can lay our burdens of all kinds down, for one hour a week, with like-minded people who are doing the same, and find peace or at least space to consider it all and return to what is true.

Are you willing? I hope so.

Amen.