

Turn! Turn! Turn!

Sermon by Reverend Rebecca M. Bryan

September 21, 2025

Hi. How are you?
Yeah, me too.

It's been a week, right? Here and in the world.

The past seven years have been something, haven't they? Here and in the world. So much.

I invite you this morning, as I have each Sunday this fall, to put aside the clamor and terror of the world and come into this space, together.

Come here where we can be one, each different and in some ways the same. For in our collective, gathered here in person and online, lie all the verities of existence. With our church ancestors, and those who are yet to come, live all the lessons and memories of a life well lived, even as it is filled with error, sadness, and loss.

Three days ago, I shared with you in writing the news that I will not be returning after my sabbatical. This means that I will serve as your Senior Minister from now until the Annual Meeting in June 2026 (likely to be held on June 7).

As I said to the children and youth, we will not spend the next eight months saying goodbye. We will continue to live and to be the church. We will laugh and cry, worship and care for one another, and strengthen our work in justice partnerships.

We will create sanctuary here. We will be sanctuary in a world that desperately needs it. We will act boldly, write letters of resistance and march together, and work with those as concerned as we are about the future of our country, her people, and the Earth. We will bless our young and bury those who die. We will laugh and cry and raise money, and we will raise hell. We are a faith that does not believe in hell. Why would we tolerate hell on Earth?

At the same time, we will reflect on our shared ministry of the past seven-plus years, learn what we can, make amends, celebrate, and yes, say goodbye.

This morning, I am going to share more with you about how I came to this decision and what it means for us, for me, and for your future.

First, I want to thank everyone who has sent me emails, texts, cards, and other forms of outreach. I want to especially thank those people in the broader community who have reached out to share their gratitude for our work together and for this church. It means the world to me.

Knowing that we are engaged and part of this community in the work of justice and across differences makes me proud of the work we have done together. It is never just about us; it never has been.

Our walls are designed to be sanctuary, warm and welcoming to all. These walls are strong, and they are porous; there is no barrier between the people within the walls and all that is happening beyond them.

Second, I want to reassure you that we/you have plenty of time to process this ministerial transition. I hope that you will come to the Parish Board/Congregational discussion after service next Sunday, where you can ask your questions about all of this and more to your Board and me.

You have plenty of time to do the work to prepare for your interim minister who will start in the fall of 2026 and be here for two years. You will use those two years of interim ministry to transition from our shared ministry to what is to come for you in the future. There will still be grief work and there will be work of visioning the future. During the interim ministry you will consider what worked well in our shared ministry and what you need in your next Senior Minister. You have plenty of time to do that before the next settled minister starts in the fall of 2028.

Right here and right now, we have eight months together between now and my departure in June 2026 to continue with the work of our church. This work cannot be put on hold when the world is on fire. We have eight months to love each other, share with each other, and come to the best place of understanding and completion that we can. I am committed to that, for all of us.

Our shared ministry has been awesome, and it deserves an awesome goodbye, which deserves

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time and space.

So, what happened? Many of you want to know.

To be clear, you learned of my decision as soon as I came to clarity that this was right. In some ways this decision has been coming for some time. In other ways I am surprised as you are.

This church is amazing. You are wonderful. I love you.

You have a fierce loyalty to this place and its people. We have approximately 50 members who have been involved with this church for 30 years or more. We learned this when we ran the list of members who were here during Bert Steeves' tenure.

We also have another 430 members and 200 friends who have been involved with this church for two weeks up to 20 years.

Welcome if you are new. You picked a good time to be here! I mean that. Liminality, or in-between time, is rich with possibility and learning.

You love. You love each other, worship and music, your programming, and this building.

You know your history, and you are proud of it. Though I encourage you to remember that the past has beauty and lessons, but is meant to help inform your future, not define it.

You are generous. You give and you show up, happily. You're a little hard on each other sometimes about how much you think others show up.

You are also open-hearted and forgiving.

You are proud of this church, and you open your doors to those in the community and beyond.

You value worship and music and keep Sunday mornings sacred. You explore and offer additional forms and times of worship.

You tell good stories, and you enjoy each other's company.

Like many of us, you sometimes get confused. You think you are not so great in areas where you are pretty amazing and that you are just fine in areas that could use some work, or honest reflection.

I have loved you the very best that I could, and I have worked too hard. And here is the reason I have made the decision to leave.

This job, my job—where I am charged with being your Chief Executive Officer, Chief Operating Officer, and Chief Bottle Washer; your spiritual leader responsible for worship, pastoral care, and staying connected to the spiritual wellbeing of our church; and a community leader and community minister—is simply too much. There is just no way that it all can be done well and in a way that is what you deserve and fair to the minister asked to do it

I've said this about my job many times over the last seven years. The change that needed to happen did not happen. We made changes around the edges, but we did not make the investment that was needed to truly support the growth and success of this church. This is an awesome church on the brink of so much goodness. Invest in the staff and ministry that you need to support all that is happening. Just like you invest in caring for the building. You need a Chief Operating Officer and two ministers.

Many of you were concerned that I worked too much and you told me as much. But being concerned is not enough. There needs to be action. This is true in all justice work. Concern is not enough. We need to care and we need to act.

We need to listen to and believe people, especially if those people are not among the ones who have traditionally held positions of power. Women, queer people, differently abled people, black and brown people. Our voices matter.

I have all the confidence that you will make the necessary changes. I will do all I can to offer you my insights into what that might look like. But it is not my ministry to implement those changes with you. That is yours and someone else's work.

In addition to the immense and ridiculous workload, I have also changed. Over the last seven and a half years, I have found myself. I have worked hard to understand and get beneath my own defenses that I used to get by in this world.

I have learned that I am hard worker, but I am

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more than that. My heart needs space and time to replenish my fire as a warrior for justice.

Some of you have asked what I will do next. I don't know. I have been 100 percent here and in this shared ministry. It wasn't ever my plan to leave. We were all going to grow old together. It is my commitment to follow the path of Love, however, and that path led me to this decision over the summer.

My ministry isn't over; it has a future just as this church does. Both of our ministries, this church's and mine, will be magnificent. Of that I have no doubt.

I'm excited and grateful for the time we have remaining. Look at what we did together in seven years; imagine what eight more months could look like!

Let's ask the hard and beautiful questions. Let's be bold and wise in our work for justice, building on the partnerships we have and being open to new ones that emerge.

Let's celebrate the gifts, learn from our lessons, be honest and kind with each other.

Let's laugh. Let's cry. Let's sing. Let's pray. Let's meditate. Let's have lunch at Loretta and take walks on the beach. Let's make it our year and know that Love lives on.

I hope we move forward with all that is planned: have the best auction yet and turn that Parish Hall into the vision we all believe it can be. That would be the best legacy of our shared ministry.

Please do not be shy asking for time or offering ideas. It may get me out of a few meetings. Ask for sermon topics; do not hold back!

You might have other questions. I hope you ask me or the Board depending on the questions.

In September 2018, in my second sermon as your called minister, I said that you were an answer to my dreams. That is still true and always will be.

What will we make of this year? We will make of it what we chose, together.

May it be love. May it be brave. May it be real, working ever for hope, peace, and justice.

Amen.