

## **“Sing Me Awake”**

*A Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Stephanie May*

*First Parish in Wayland*

*April 3, 2022*

More than once these past couple years, I’ve just wanted to scream! Which is to say that I’ve felt a lot of anger throughout the pandemic. But why *anger*? After a lot of reflection, I have come to understand: the anger is a mask for grief.

We have all lost much these past years—individually and together. I cancelled a dream trip with my mom to Paris in April 2020 just as some of you also cancelled trips near and far. Some of you lost the opportunity for high school and college graduations with family—or simply visiting your college kids at a place farther away than down the hall. Some of you lost many, many months before meeting new grandchildren as precious moments of childhood passed. Parents lost so much sleep, so many dreams for how they imagined parenting their kids. Rather, you spent hours figuring out Zoom school and then the ever-shifting protocols of testing and masking. And, finally, some of you have lost your jobs, your marriages, and, yes, even family and friends.

As a community, we have lost the opportunity to offer a hug or quiet word in Coffee Hour to share the burden of our losses. With breakout rooms, MidWeek Check-in, phone calls, and notes, we have tried to stay connected, tried to share the heartaches and challenges of these years. But the need for distance segregated us, undermining the very essence of what defines us: *congregating*.

I am grateful for the gifts of technology that offered a modicum of relief from the distance and the isolation. And yet, it isn’t the same, is it?! We miss the small conversations, the smiles passing in the hall, the serendipitous connections that become new friendships, programs, or possibilities. We miss the sense of “buzz” that emerges on a Sunday morning before the service begins, that electric current that links us one to another into a body larger than ourselves.

Today, the loss I place on this altar of grief is the “buzz” of the in-person congregation we were in March 2020. We had plans—plans like MetroWest Climate Solutions hosting a large gathering to hear Senator Mike Barrett where we would hand out these cards describing the group and listing our website. Cards that have remained in a box on a shelf in my office. We will not ever know what might have become of the buzzing congregation of March 2020. History intervened and turned our course.

My time away these past two weeks became a meditation on history. I visited varied historical sites: the Reconstruction Era National Park in Beaufort, SC where formerly enslaved persons first tasted freedom, waged labor, and education; Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia where Lee surrendered his Confederate troops to Grant; and the

Woolworth Counter in Greensboro, North Carolina where students—teenagers—chose to defy the degradation of Jim Crow by taking a seat and asking for a cup of coffee.

Visiting these historical sites while also reading about the war in Ukraine, I had a sense of History with a capital “H.” There are times when the moment and the movement of events around us is too large to ignore or to stop. We must surrender to History. Ignoring events is simply not possible amidst the widespread impact. Our only choice becomes how to respond to the circumstances of the moment.

The pandemic has been a moment of global history. We have all had to surrender, to lose control to its relentless impact upon us. We have all had to grieve losses of people, of freedoms, of a future that will never be. We could not simply hit pause and hold our breath for a month, maybe two. We had to accept the changes. We had to let go.

The poet Gregory Orr counsels:

*This is what was bequeathed us:  
This earth the beloved left  
And, leaving,  
Left to us.*

*No other world  
But this one:  
Willows and the river  
And the factory  
With its black smokestacks.*

This, this is the world bequeathed to us. The one without our beloved. The one with grief and loss. As well as the one with natural beauty beneath a sky choked by black smoke.

But we don’t want to surrender! We like to be the people who *do something*. We are the religion of *deeds not creeds*. We are the ones who can *make a difference*. Until we can’t. At least, not really. Not in a way that simply makes the problem go away. Sometimes we cannot “fix” the problem, we can only surrender to the world bequeathed to us in this moment of history.

We did not choose this moment, nor want these events, nor may we be happy about it. Not the losses of experiences, of gatherings, of people. Not the forced adaptation to Zoom and multiplatform worship. Not the ever-changing advice about masking, vaccinations, and what constitutes “safe” for individuals and for groups. But this is the world bequeathed to us. We have no choice but how to respond within the context we inherit.

We are here on *this* shore littered with the refuse of our lost hopes, our broken dreams for what our life *should* have been like in 2020, ‘21, ‘22. Let us name where we are and

acknowledge what we have indeed lost. Let us hear the sorrow in our own heart and the grief in another's. And let us have compassion for one another.

We have all been changed by what was bequeathed us by this moment, this history, this loss. And, as the poet Orr counsels, there is:

*No meaning but what we find here.*

*No purpose but what we make.*

*That, and the beloved's clear instructions:*

*Turn me into song; sing me awake.*

Having accepted what shore we now live upon. Having acknowledged the losses and our grief. What meaning and purpose might we now make? What song might we now sing? What buzz might we reignite within this congregation?

This may not be where we wanted to be. And we may not be happy about it. But this is where we are. And there is still so much beauty to be seen. The willow tree. The river. The daffodils emerging. The laughter of children. The wonder of life and love.

Yes, there are still the black smokestacks and the rise of "Don't Say Gay" legislation and a whole litany of things that *should* be different. But let us not only scream and weep. Let us also remember to sing. Let us pay attention as spring arrives. Let us dare to reconnect with people in person here and/or other places that matter to us. Let us still live, even here, on this shore where we never wanted to be.

May it be so.

Amen.