

“Hello”

Homily by the Rev. Dr. Stephanie May

First Parish in Wayland

September 11, 2022

Hello. It's such a simple word, isn't it? And yet, it's such an important word. Consider how 'hello'—or its equivalent—is one of the first or even only words we learn in another language. What are some other words for hello that you know in other languages?

Why do we know we know so many words for saying hello? I suspect it is because saying hello is a meaningful tool for connecting us to each other and to our world. Sometimes the most simple and familiar words can hide the most significant and profound meanings. Sometimes the most simple and familiar words teach us something very important.

So, what does the practice of saying “hello” teach us?

Irish poet Pádraig Ó Tuama describes saying 'hello' and greeting what we encounter in our living as “an old technology.” For example, Pádraig notes how the ancient Sufi mystic Rumi challenges us to “welcome and entertain” those who show up at our door—even those we find unpleasant. Greeting is opening the door to whatever arrives in our lives. On this point, Pádraig writes,

“So, say hello to old wounds, hello to our lack of capacity to control, hello to this circumstance that doesn't seem to be ending quickly, hello to the unexpected phone call, hello to the unexpected sadness, hello to the unexpected happiness and consolation. And by saying hello to something, you're saying, “You're here,” and, “I'm here with you, here.” And what does that mean? It asks us to do a radical act of naming the simple truth of the present.”ⁱ

To say hello brings us face to face with the current moment.

When we say hello, we are saying, “here I am” and “I'm here with you, here.” We are locating ourselves in the present and we are opening ourselves to that present.

There is so much in life we do not control. A virus arrives and disrupts the globe. Businesses close. Schools move online. Uncertainty takes over. This is our truth. So is it true that today we are still here, using our new skills of gathering outside and online. When we arrived here today we were not certain about what we would find, who we would greet,

what would happen. And yet, we came. By arriving we opened ourselves to these moments and to each other. By arriving, we say hello, “here I am” and “I’m here with you, here.”

Whatever else may happen this day, this year may not be known, but we know that in this moment we are here, present, together. This is no small thing. Showing up to this community, for each other *is* core to who we are. We remind ourselves of this each week when we repeat our covenant—which is just another way of saying “hello”, of saying here I am with an open mind and loving heart to be with you in searching for meaning, in caring, in working with you to make a better world.

And so, as we start this year, my ask of us is simple. May we commit to saying “hello”, to showing up for each other, for this community. We may not know what will be showing up at our door in the coming weeks or months, but we can open the door, gather, and face whatever it is together.

So may it be.

ⁱ Irish poet Pádraig Ó Tuama, *In the Shelter*, quoted in *Golden: The Power of Silence in a World of Noise*, Justin Zorn and Leigh Marz