

Good morning Salt and Light! If today is one of your first few times with us, I want to say welcome to our beautifully messy community, and thank you for being with us. If you have been coming to Salt and Light for any length of time, however, and I see many familiar faces here today, you are probably accustomed to seeing Pastor Melissa, now our former pastor (doesn't THAT sound strange to hear?), stand where I am now standing, ushering us into Spirit's presence with fiery poetic language and inviting us to dance along through unencumbered, free-limbed, body-loving worship. Do you all remember Pastor Melissa worshipping with her body? The truth is, few people could move me, inspire me, and lovingly call me to action like she could, *and did time and time again*. And now, here we are today, and our community is midwifing transition, change, and uncertainty. And that's exactly what we need to talk about today. And so, even though Melissa has been called into a different expression of her vocation – we also need to pack our bags, and we need to say our goodbyes to the familiar of what has been, and we are going to join the Magi on a faith-filled journey to the uncertain, taking what's familiar with us in our hearts.

And the first stop on our journey simply invites us to take a brief moment to tune in. Did you notice how different today feels? Are your senses awake? Are you paying attention? Did the flow of our liturgy feel any different today? What's the energy in the room like today? Is it different? Is some part of it unfamiliar to you, like an ungreeted stranger? We have to pay attention. We have to pay attention to what is changing. We have to pay attention to what we have lost, so that we can grieve well. And we have to pay attention to what is stirring and what is taking root and what is taking shape in our very midst, so we don't miss it.

My name is Jacob, maybe I should have started with that, and I have been a member of this transformative community for about four years. I am not a pastor by profession, I am a licensed clinical social worker and I work for Clackamas County, where I support people who are experiencing mental health crisis. Although I am grateful to say that I

have attended seminary and even preached here a couple of times before, I am not going to start referencing ancient Greek and Hebrew words today, and I am not going to give you the typical “3 points and a poem” sermon, so I'm sorry if those are the kinds of things that brought you here today. But something tells me that those aren't really the things that brought us together today, because I know that we are anything but your typical, run-of-the-mill Sunday morning, show-up-and-leave, Get-Your-Quick-Jesus-Fix, kind of church. And though it may seem odd to have a mental health professional deliver your sermon this morning, I am going to invite you to just buckle in and join me for this ride, okay?

Listening to these words from Matthew today entices me to notice the stirring and shaking movement of Spirit. Did you read the words? Did you catch it? Spirit is guiding, leading, dream-weaving, migrating with and along, disrupting status quo, crossing arbitrary borders and boundaries, upsetting powers-that-be, and sending us on star-chasing adventures, ultimately reminding us that what is now, is not what will be. Ever. *Does the wind blow just once?* And so we are reminded time and again that both change and love are the inevitable constants in our life. Change and love.

But because change in particular is an ever-present part of our reality together, I think we as a community really need to talk about change's dear friend, uncertainty, because you can't have change without uncertainty – Uncertainty of what's going to happen next, of who we are becoming, and of what we can still count on. One of my other roles around here is being a part of our CMLT – congregational missional leadership team. We are a group of people who assist with some of the leadership functions in the church. And I have been getting some questions about what's *next*. Who is *next*? When is *next* happening? And that funny word “interim” keeps getting talked about. Well, today my friends, like I said before, we are joining the Magi on a journey, trusting that what's ahead is well worth the risk of facing uncertainty together. And I want to be clear from

the get-go, the reality is, I don't know. I mean, I guess there are some things that I think that I know, and I can share those things with you all in a bit, but really, I don't know.

And I don't like "I don't know." "I don't know" places me out of control, and makes me feel really vulnerable. I like to be in the know. Anyone else like that here? I hear that for some people, when they face uncertainty in their lives, they become excited by possibility. Like, "Ooh, I wonder what will happen *next*?" But if I am honest with you, I am not like that, and I know that I am not alone. In fact, I would venture to say that the majority of us probably feel some discomfort when we experience uncertainty. We know that change can be good and is necessary, but uncertainty brought about by change can easily unsettle us.

Uncertainty and unfamiliarity actually play to some of our deepest, biologically-wired survival-based fears. Fear that what I don't know could hurt me. Fear that I might be left behind or forgotten about. Fear that things might turn out badly, or too messy, or too complicated. Fear that somehow the result of whatever change occurs might reflect poorly on me and I will be judged, criticized, or shunned by the larger community.

Fear, and its closely-related associates of stress and anxiety, live in a tiny part of our brain called the Amygdala. Have any of you heard about this little almond-sized part of your brain? If you ball up your hand with your thumb in the middle, this is a very simplified version of what your brain is like. Your Amygdala is your thumb and represents the tiny part of your primal lizard brain that acts like a smoke alarm. It's job is to be on the lookout for things in our lives that could threaten our wellbeing. The larger part on top represents our prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain that helps us engineer buildings, engage in critical reasoning, compose symphonies, and maintain rationality with our emotions. Ideally, this top part of your brain helps to keep the Amygdala in check. For instance, we know the difference between seeing a lion in nature, which can ignite extreme fear, and seeing a lion at the zoo, where we might feel excitement and

curiosity because we maintain a general assumption of our safety. But when our Amygdala is convinced that it perceives some real danger in our environment, this top part of our brain that helps us stay rational kind of flies out the window, because its ability to solve complex problems would only slow us down in the event that we might have to fight for our very lives.

And so the Amygdala initiates a very complex process that involves our brain and our central nervous system – sending adrenaline, norepinephrine, and cortisol through our bodies to help our hearts beat faster to circulate more blood to our limbs, it helps our lungs to expand with more oxygen, our pupils to dilate so we can see better, and our sweat pores to open up so we can cool down better if we have to run or fight. Our bodies are hard-wired to have a strong survival response to fear, which is sometimes very helpful, but for all those other times that we experience fear and maybe have no real need for worry, what do we lose? Well, when we are afraid, we can't learn new information – your hippocampus is less likely to wire in new information. When we are afraid, we tend not to be as thoughtful of others' needs. It is hard for us to love when we are afraid. When we are afraid, we tend not to be vulnerable with one another, opting to be guarded and shut down. Fear makes us an entirely different creature, prone to aggression, impulsivity, rash decisions, and snap judgments that are based in biased assumptions.

See this is what happens when you put a mental health therapist in charge of the sermon. If the uncertainty of our community's transition is raising any fear or anxiety in our hearts, we need to pay attention to this. Now, we don't need to approach our biology with any judgment or shame simply because we are experiencing emotion or we are feeling unsettled by anticipated transitions. But we need to acknowledge that this is not who we are. We are not closed off, reactive, guarded, impulse-driven, and internally preoccupied with ourselves alone. It's not in our community's DNA.

So what's the antidote? What do we do when we are afraid? We take some deep breaths, we name it – "I am afraid" – and then we talk about it, and we gain some reassurance from our togetherness, and we remind ourselves what we have control over, and what we don't. We continue to share our stories, we continue to be together – dreaming and discerning together. And a big one for me is we rely on the wisdom of those who have been here before. Many of us here have shepherded change in our community before, and now more than ever we need your wisdom, we need your stories, to help ground us in who we are, so we can stay faithful on this star-chasing journey through uncertainty, even when we cross into new, unfamiliar territory.

So what do we think we know about what's next? Well, the CMLT, the Leaven Board, and some of our community's strategic leaders have been diligently meeting to prepare a proposal for an Interim Leadership Structure for our community. We will hopefully be sending some ideas to the Bishop's office for some feedback this month. Having a plan for interim leadership will ensure that the day-to-day tasks of our community continue so the whole community can engage in a larger process of community discernment around our mission and the kind of leadership we need based on who we are. This part can take a while. We want to do this right. Rest assured there will be many opportunities to be involved in this process going forward. In fact, we can't do this without you. We will all be invited into a process of discernment.

But for now, remember, we just started our journey. We are still remembering, still grieving while celebrating Melissa's transition, taking one breath at a time, noticing and paying attention to what's occurring in our midst. We are resisting fear that wants us to keep our distance from our neighbors. We are going to continue to engage our vulnerability, share our stories, and find new ways to love each other through this unknown, because that, my friends, is exactly who we are. Amen.