

Choir:
(singing)

Courtney Godwin:
Good morning.

Congregation:
Good morning.

Courtney Godwin:

The theme of this academic year is climate grief. This is true both for the Memorial Church as an official theme of our programming, and also for myself as I attempt to write a thesis that helps me to articulate the intense emotional variability that comes just with living in this time.

Climate grief acknowledges the losses that accompany climate change. They cause trauma and negatively affect our mental health.

Some of these losses may seem small, cancellations of marathons or music festivals due to storms or heat waves, but we are also witnessing a species extinction rate that is now hundreds of times what is considered normal.

Missed events and loss of entire species, while on sides of a wide, wide spectrum, are both things to mourn.

Yet this grief isn't only about mourning. It also recognizes the uncanniness of climate change.

We can bask in the sun on those odd 70 degree days in November in Boston, and the whole time I think, "Joy can't be wrong, but the circumstances that are causing this joy are. It shouldn't be this warm this late in fall this far north, right?"

Climate grief for me holds space for this ambivalence. The happiness from the sun on my face, the worry that the weather should not be acting this way, and the guilt that eats at me; how can I be taking this small pleasure from a phenomenon that causes so much pain and suffering?

And there's a bigger guilt. Climate change is the direct result of human actions.

In her most recent album, Taylor Swift, the icon of our generation, sings, "It's me. Hi. I'm the problem. It's me." And this is true when it comes to climate change. Not as individuals, but as a collective people, our lifestyles, our consumption, and our complicity are the problem.

Last month, professor of Christian Theology at Duke Divinity School, Norman Wirzba, spoke from this very lectern about finding hope as we look towards a worrisome future.

Wirzba advocates for confession, repentance, and seeking forgiveness as essential to climate grief.

In this church, every Sunday, we say a prayer of confession, asking to be cleansed of all offenses. But what I find odd is that we don't apologize. We trust in the grace of God that we will be forgiven, whether or not we apologize or even confess.

And I think that's right. God's love is endless and God's grace is infinite. We are deserving of that love and grace, whether or not we confess or apologize.

But when it comes to our earth, confessing to God isn't enough. We must also confess to the land and to our neighbors; the humans, the animals, and the plants with whom we share the earth.

Susan Wise Bauer offers what I find to be a helpful distinction between apologies and confession.

An apology is an expression of regret: "I am sorry." A confession is an admission of fault: "I am sorry because I did wrong."

There's a third piece of this formula that Bauer is missing. Apology and confession are incomplete without reparation: "I'm sorry because I did wrong. I will do better."

We are imperfect. We make mistakes; often the same ones time and time again. Confession isn't a promise to sin never again, but confession should be a promise that we're going to try to do just a little bit better even if we fail week after week.

Confession, like climate grief, is comfortable in ambivalence and with the uncanny.

We can cherish unseasonably warm weather while worried about its implications. We can contribute to climate change and mourn its effects. We can regret our wrongdoings and we can rejoice.

They mean we have room to grow. We can mess up and we can call on God and on each other to lead us to do better.

We cannot fix climate change on our own, but when we can best our part in it, we can begin to unpack the complex dynamics of and meaningfully respond to our collective climate grief.

Will you pray with me?

Dear God, you created this earth and called it good. We confess that we forget the holiness of the world around us. We confess that we do not do right by it, by you, by each other, or by ourselves. We are sorry because we did wrong. Help us to do better. We ask for your mercy and your grace, knowing they are infinite and they are freely given.

Give us the strengths to confess to one another and help us to extend your mercy to our neighbors. Hold us in these complex emotions and these scary times and stay with us as we try to do better for you, for each other and for ourselves.

Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Courtney Godwin:

Please rise in body and spirit for The Lord's Prayer.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Please join in singing the hymn, I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light, hymn number 107.

Congregation/Choir:

(Singing).

Courtney Godwin:

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord and to love and serve one another.

This transcript was exported on Dec 06, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

(Music).