“DEATH IN DUAL (AND DUELING) PERSPECTIVES”
Skagit Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
November 1, 2026
Speaker: Rev. Bruce Bode
Celebrant: Doreen Sadler
Music: Sally Riggers, Kathy Roche-Zujko
Media: George Rogers-Clark

Sermon Title & Description: “Death in Dual (and Dueling) Perspectives” – In nature, death is not a factor of special importance; it’s simply part of the turning wheel of Being as it rolls onward through time. But to us in our human world death is a factor of huge significance. At this time of the year when the “veil between the worlds is thinnest,” and taking a cue from neuroanatomist Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor’s book *My Stroke of Insight*, this sermon will explore our encounter with death from both the “left-brain” (“ego-consciousness”) and the “right-brain” (“cosmic consciousness”) perspectives.

Biographical Data on Guest Speaker

Bruce A. Bode is Minister Emeritus at the Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship (QUUF) in Port Townsend, Washington, from which he retired in 2018 as the Senior Minister after serving the congregation for fourteen years (2004-2018). Before coming to Port Townsend, Rev. Bode was the Interim Minister of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston, Texas (2002-2004) and the Hope Unitarian Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma (2001-2002). Prior to that, he served for twenty-two years (1978-2001) as an Associate Minister at the Fountain Street Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, a large, independent, religiously liberal congregation.

Introduction of Theme for Service

My sermon this morning will be related to this season of the year and to our entry into the darker half of the year. It’s the time of the year in which it is felt that the “veil between the worlds is thinnest” – the boundary line between the living and the dead, between what we presently are and what we might become, is exceedingly thin.

It’s at this time of the year that we observe the holidays and holy days of Hallowe’en (All Hallows’ Eve), All Saints Day, All Souls Day, and the Day of the Dead, (*Día de los Muertos*), celebrated on today’s date of November 1 and tomorrow, November 2.

It’s a time when we especially remember those who have gone before us and have been part of our lives, those who have loved and cared for us, those who have inspired us in the past and who inspire us still.

Opening Hymn #336: “All My Memories of Love”

Let’s continue our service with a touching, tender hymn titled “All My Memories of Love,” the words of Russian poet Anna Akhmatova.

1. All my memories of love hang upon high stars.
All the souls I've lost to tears now the autumn jars;
and the air around me here thickens with their song;
sing again their nameless tunes, sing again, and strong.

2. Willows in September touch the water clear,
set among the rushes tall of the flowing year.
Rising up from sunlit past comes the shadowed sigh
running toward me silently, love to fortify.

3. Many are the graceful hearts hung upon this tree.
And it seems there's room for mine on these branches free;
and the sky above the tree, whether wet or bright,
is my ease and comforting, my good news and light.

(Anna Akhmatova, words; Mark Belletini, tr.; Solesmes version of plainsong melody, adapted)

Sermon: "DEATH IN DUAL (AND DUELING) PERSPECTIVES"

A. Introduction

My sermon this morning is titled "Death in Dual (and Dueling) Perspectives." And I will approach this subject as a kind of duel, dividing my sermon into three parts, with musical breaks between the parts: first, presenting the two sides of the duel, followed, thirdly, by ways the two sides might manage their tension.

Death as an abiding presence

I'm now a couple months into my 80th year on planet Earth, and death is, increasingly, an abiding presence. It's always been there in the background – sometimes in the foreground – but, increasingly, I live with it as a foreground experience, daily measuring and weighing things quite consciously within this framework of the passage of time and the approach of death.

In part, this increased consciousness is also related to my wife Flossie's encounter with ovarian cancer over the last five years – she just finished five months of treatment for a second occurrence. When we first learned of her cancer on March 1, 2021, it was already well-advanced. We didn't know at that time if death might be weeks or months away. Fortunately, through the advances in modern medicine, the assistance of very fine medical personnel, and Flossie's own pro-active approach to her illness, more time has been given to her and to us … but once that door opens, it never quite closes.

Death as related to two centers in the psyche

So, this morning I'll be sharing some of my thoughts in regard to individual human death … which are, essentially, two-fold in nature and based largely on the approach of depth psychologist Carl Jung's notion of there being two centers of the human psyche: a smaller

center, which has to do with "ego-consciousness," and a larger, deeper center, which is related to what may be called "cosmic consciousness."

A book: *My Stroke of Insight*

Also, along this line, some years ago a little book titled *My Stroke of Insight* came my way, which has been helpful to me in organizing my thoughts around human death. This book was written by Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor, a neuroanatomist, who for a number of years taught and did research at the Harvard Medical School.

I've spoken here about this book before and I'd like to start my sermon by, again, briefly reviewing it, as it looks at human death from dual (and, I would say, dueling) perspectives.

Here's the story:

While a researcher at the Harvard Medical School, on December 10, 1996, Dr. Taylor, a woman only thirty-seven years old at the time, experienced a massive stroke in the left-hemisphere of her brain.

And what Dr. Taylor knew about before intellectually, she now *experienced* during her stroke. She knew that the left-hemisphere of the brain is the center of personal identity, the "ego center," as she names it.

It's the part of us that has picked from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil … the part of us that makes distinctions and passes judgments … AND the part of us that knows time, past and future, and can anticipate, with anxiety, its own end.

And when a blood vessel in this part of her brain hemorrhaged and started to close down the functioning of her left-brain – to go off-line, as it were – she began to experience her personal identity slipping away … but strangely, it didn't bother her so much because now she *also* began to experience more fully how her right-brain functioned.

And her right-brain, she found, is timeless, dwells in the present only, and is oceanic and fluid in its feel.

The right-brain, she discovered, experiences itself as *one* with all that is, a part of the endless flow of infinite Being … which may be represented by the Tree of Eternal Life.

Different hemispheric responses to personal death

Thus, as Dr. Taylor experienced, the two hemispheres of our brain apparently have different approaches to the question of our personal death.

When people, for example, say, "When you're dead, you're dead, and that's it, kaput;" they are speaking from the perspective of the left-hemisphere of the brain.

The right-hemisphere, however, has a very different story to tell, namely, that we have a larger identity and are one with everything that is, and there is, really, no such thing as death, for everything is all of one piece.

Dr. Taylor puts it this way: "My left mind thinks of me as a fragile individual capable of losing my life. My right mind realizes that the essence of my being has eternal life." (p. 169)

And, for Dr. Taylor, we are paradoxically both at once; or, again, as she puts it: "… I am simultaneously capable of being at *one* with the universe, while having an individual identity…" (p. 160)

(NOTE: There's a marvelous 18-minute TED lecture from February 2008 that you can find on the Internet in which Dr. Taylor describes her experience and the conclusions that she has drawn from them.
Link: https://www.ted.com/talks/jill_bolte_taylor_my_stroke_of_insight?language=en)

B. Death from the perspective of ego-consciousness

So, let's look more closely at these two perspectives on death … beginning with the ego's perspective on death.

Following the approach of depth psychologist Carl Jung and his students, the "ego" may be described as that part of the human psyche, our interior being, that has to do with our capacity to be *self*-aware or *self*-conscious.

Jungian author Robert A. Johnson, for example, speaks of the "ego" as the "organ of self-awareness," or the "organ of self-consciousness."

As the "organ of *self*-consciousness," the "ego" comes into existence with the evolutionary development of the neo-cortex in the forefront of our brain, manifesting itself in members of our species around the age of two … for it's at that time that we begin to have the conscious sense of being an individual and having a personal identity. It's at that age that we start using that magical word "I."

It's because we have an "ego" that we use the word "I" … and, correspondingly, the word "I" is a manifestation or demonstration of the presence of the "ego."

(Years ago, I watched with great interest as this development took place in my own children … when, at around the age of two, they began using the word "I.")

So, the "ego" is that part of our psyche that has to do with self-identity and self-consciousness.

We may say the "ego" is the mechanism of our psyche through which and by which we can become elated, inflated, and deflated.

It's through the "ego" that we experience and suffer loss and its accompanying emotions. This experience of loss is related to perceived threats, injuries, and defeats to our self-

identity, our self-image – to who we think are, to what we think we believe, to whom we are connected, and so forth.

The instinct to preserve ourselves

All creatures, it would seem, have laid deep within them the instinct to live and to preserve themselves.

As poet Mary Oliver puts it, "It is the light at the center of every cell" – the instinct that "says to oblivion: not me!" ("The Black Snake," by Mary Oliver, from *New & Selected Poems,* pp. 184-185, and *Twelve Moons*, p. 9)

Thus, all creatures seek life and resist death … but no other creature, from what we can observe, seems to experience the prospect of individual death as the psychological blow like we humans do – though certain more developed creatures seem headed in this direction – but certainly with us humans the awareness of individual death brings with it huge amounts of anticipatory anxiety … and, then, in the encounter with actual death, immense amounts of sorrow, grief, anger, despair, and so forth.

Can you imagine your own death?

And I wonder if your experience is the same as mine in regard to considering one's own death … in that I question whether one can really, truly imagine one's own death.

I've tried … and I find I really can't imagine it … for how can you imagine the end of your own identity? So long as you are aware and thinking and considering things, your identity is intact.

Thus, my experience is that one can't really imagine the dissolution of one's own consciousness, because such imagination requires self-consciousness.

So, it seems to me that the "ego," the "organ of self-consciousness," cannot really imagine its own dissolution.

Death as nothingness/extinction from the ego's perspective

Or another angle on this: When you try to imagine your own death, what you get is "nothingness."

From the perspective of the "ego-center," death is "nothingness." So long as the ego is attached to its own processes and to personal identity, then death, which involves the dissolution of the ego, means extinction, "nothingness."

This perspective is represented in a remarkable essay that came my way a few years ago from someone who was a member of the Unitarian Universalist congregation that I served in Port Townsend.

The essay is titled "A Personal View of Life and Death," and it's written by Quentin Wald, who died on August 24, 2024, at the age of 104 years old … and who, obviously, had a longer time to consider these matters than most of us. I'll end the first part of this sermon by quoting several opening paragraphs from his essay.

Quentin writes:

> "From the vantage point of my present age – [and I think Quentin was in his mid-to-late 80s when he wrote this] – it appears to me to be impossible for a young person to perceive the idea of death with any full realization. The sense of life is too pressing and mortality is only theoretical for the young. Only when it becomes obvious that not enough time remains to enjoy experiences or accomplishments long planned or hoped for does the sense of mortality become immanent.
>
> "First of all, I am certain death is the onset of non-existence. Since death is nothingness, it is nothing to fear. The difficulty is in giving up life.
>
> "Each human consciousness is a whole universe in its conception of the world, of the society in which it moves, and in its knowledge, its memories, and its relation to other beings. When it dies, a whole universe of marvelous complexity collapses and is destroyed.
>
> "As a child's swarm of soap bubbles drifts among the trees, each one a perfect sphere of evanescent colors, so is each human consciousness; but then, on touching a leaf or twig, the bubble silently collapses, leaving only a little wet spot which quickly evaporates. Thus is a life ended and remembered briefly by a few and very soon not at all.
>
> "I regard ideas of immortality or of any sort of personal continuation beyond death as a common and, in fact, rather childish illusion which is a consequence of the impossibility of imagining non-existence and of the will to live which is so strongly inculcated in every animal by the evolutionary struggle for survival.
>
> "When higher brain function is immobilized in deep anesthesia or even in deep sleep, there is no awareness. How then can it be otherwise when that two pounds of pink and gray mush ceases to function or is totally destroyed? It is pretty well established that memory is stored in the pattern of neuronal connections.
>
> "Since this ceases to exist when the brain disintegrates, a soul persisting beyond death would have no memory of this life. On persisting into a future life it would then be, at most, only the raw material for a new individual consciousness and could scarcely be considered a continuation of the present individual in any meaningful sense.
>
> "It may also be observed that there is no continuity of self into the past before conception. By simple symmetry one would expect none after death."
>
> (Quentin Wald, excerpted from "A Personal View of Life and Death," *Poetry and Philosophy*, p. 40)

Musical Interlude: "And When I Die"

On those somber notes, let's take our first musical break and listen to the song "And When I Die" … a song composed by singer-song writer Laura Nyro, remarkably only 17 years old at the time … and the first song she ever wrote.

It was first recorded by the folk group Peter, Paul, and Mary, who had purchased her song for $5,000 … and the song was made even more popular by the jazz-rock group Blood, Sweat & Tears, whose version we will now hear.

Verse 1:

I'm not scared of dying
And I don't really care
If it's peace you find in dying
Well then, let the time be near
If it's peace you find in dying
And if dying time is near
Just bundle up my coffin
'Cause it's cold way down there
I hear that it's cold way down there, yeah
Crazy cold, way down there

Chorus:

And when I die, and when I'm gone
There'll be, one child born in this world
To carry on, to carry on

Verse 2:

Now troubles are many
They're as deep as a well
I can swear there ain't no Heaven
But I pray there ain't no hell
Swear there ain't no Heaven
And I'll pray there ain't no hell
But I'll never know by livin'
Only my dyin' will tell, yes, only my
Dyin' will tell, oh yeah
Only my dyin' will tell

Chorus:

And when I die, and when I'm gone
There'll be one child born in this world
To carry on, to carry on, yeah, yeah
Yee-haw!

Verse 3:

Give me my freedom
For as long as I be
All I ask of livin'
Is to have no chains on me
All I ask of livin'
Is to have no chains on me
And all I ask of dyin' is to
Go naturally, only wanna
Go naturally

Bridge:

Here I go, hah!
Hey hey
Here come the devil
Right behind
Look out children, here he come
Here he come, hey

Don't wanna go by the devil
Don't wanna go by demon
Don't wanna go by Satan
Don't wanna die uneasy
Just let me go
Naturally

Chorus:

And when I die, and when I'm dead, dead and gone
There'll be one child born in a world
To carry on, to carry on
Yeah, yeah

C. Death from the perspective of "cosmic-consciousness"

So, this song speaks of the ego's confrontation with death and its sense of death as extinction – of being "dead, dead, and gone" – and of the wish, while alive, to live free … and, when dying time comes, to "go naturally."

But this song also speaks of a certain continuity in life, namely, the sense that life is passed from generation to generation, as we heard in the words:

And when I die,
and when I'm dead, dead and gone
There'll be one child born in a world
To carry on, to carry on

Actually, in the original lyrics by songwriter and singer Laura Nyro, the beginning words of the song are:

> And when I die
> and when I'm dead, dead and gone,
> There'll be one child born *and* [italics added]
> a world to carry on, to carry on

… words that I like better and which the folk musical group Peter, Paul, and Mary use in their rendering of the song.

At any rate, these words speak of the ego as identifying not just with its own individual being and processes but also identifying with ongoing life and being beyond itself.

Crossing over to the right hemisphere of the brain

So, now, following this lead, and following the lead of Dr. Taylor, let's cross over from the left-side of the brain to the right-side of the brain by way of that thick mass of connecting tissues called the "corpus callosum." Let's take that bridge and cross over to the right-hemisphere of our brain to get its perspective on individual human death.

And, as I mentioned earlier, the right-hemisphere has a very different story to tell, namely, that we are one with everything that is, and there is no such thing as death, only the one, ongoing Reality … or, as poet Walt Whitman has put it:

> "All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,
> And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier."

Thus, the "ego" may not be able to imagine the end of its own consciousness, but what it can experience – and what it can identify with – is life beyond its own life and being beyond its own being. Indeed, it can identify not only with the next generation, not only with a single child being born, but it can identify with what has been called "cosmic consciousness."

So, let's turn to that perspective on death.

"Cosmic consciousness" and the "mystical dimension" of our life

And this, as I regard it, brings in the "mystical dimension" in which one both conceives and experiences that all things are of one piece. It's the mental awareness – and the felt experience – of an identity that transcends one's individual identity and in which one sees and feels oneself to be part of a universal, ongoing cosmic flow.

In mystical approaches, an *identity* is implied between you and the other. The barrier, the boundary, between you and the other is withdrawn so that the two are seen as one larger reality. As Joseph Campbell has put it, "We are one before we are two."

In mystical experience, from the one side, it is subtraction: the dissolving of the distinctions between things, the blurring of the boundaries. And from the other side, it is addition: the positive recognition of a fundamental unity and identity of all That Is in the ongoing in give and take of things. Cries the poet Robinson Jeffers:

> Erase the lines: I pray you not to love classifications:
> The thing is like a river, from source to sea-mouth
> One flowing life. (Excerpt from "Monument," *The Beginning and the End*, p. 25)

Or, again, from poet Kahlil Gibran:

> "For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one."
> ("On Death," from *The Prophet*, p. 80)

So, mystical experience has to do with an experience of an essential identity of things beneath and beyond their surface differences.

The Jungian concept of the "Self"

It would seem, as Dr. Taylor experienced, that the right-hemisphere of the human brain is the part of the brain that is more connected to the unity and oneness of things and to larger identity.

And I would also connect this with what depth psychologist Carl Jung and his followers have named the "Self," with a capital "S."

The "Self," as the Jungians speak of it, refers to the larger, deeper, transpersonal center of our psychological structure ... and from which the personal center, the "ego," emerges … with the "ego" continually visited and informed by the larger center by means of drives, impulses, inspirations, dreams, visions, and so forth.

I don't say there is an absolute one-to-one correspondence between the right-hemisphere of the brain and what the Jungians name the "Self," or a one-to-one correspondence of the left-hemisphere of the brain to the "ego;" but, in a general way, I think we can say that the right-hemisphere of the brain is connected to our sense of being related to that which is "transpersonal" – to that which is greater than an individual identify and being.

Thus, the "Self," the larger and deeper center of the human psyche, is that part of our being that is connected to the center of Being-itself, to Nature, to Creativity, to God, to That Which Is Beyond Naming, and, at the same time, to That Which Has Names Without Number.

And whereas the "ego" experiences loss and suffering as it focuses on maintaining and protecting its individual identity, it can also open to the deeper center of the psyche, to the larger "Self," which sees itself as part of "cosmic consciousness," and thus transcends loss and suffering and rolls on … and on … and on … and on.

Interlude Hymn #352: "Find a Stillness"

Let's take our second musical break and sing the two verses of the hymn "Find a Stillness." I particularly like the first line of the second verse which reads: "Seek the essence, hold the essence, let the essence carry me."

1. Find a stillness, hold a stillness, let the stillness carry me.
Find the silence, hold the silence, let the silence carry me.
In the spirit, by the spirit, with the spirit giving power,
I will find true harmony.

2. Seek the essence, hold the essence, let the essence carry me.
Let me flower, help me flower, watch me flower, carry me.
In the spirit, by the spirit, with the spirit giving power,
I will find true harmony.

(Words: Carl Seaburg; music: Transylvania hymn tune, harmony by Larry Phillips)

D. Conclusion: Approaching Death with Dual Perspectives

I've spoken now of two perspectives on personal death, both of which are wired into our brains – capacities for both "ego-consciousness" and "cosmic consciousness."

So, how do we live with these two, often, competing perspectives? Can we relate them? How do we relate them?

The "ego" as a passing phenomenon

Here's a quotation from Jungian author John A. Sanford on the relationship of the "ego" to the larger "Self." Sanford writes:

> "But the ego, as we know it, is but a passing phenomenon; the true reality is the soul or, in psychological language, the expression of the Self. The task of the ego is to accumulate consciousness and to be willing to die when its time comes; thus the ego is important, but not the most important thing. Anything less than this turns religion into another form of egocentricity." – [That is, the ego not understanding its proper role in life, not serving the larger Self.]
>
> (John A. Sanford, *Mystical Christianity: A Psychological Commentary on the Gospel of John*, p. 248)

Secondly, let's turn to a short poem on the distinction, relationship, and partnership of the "ego" to the "Self."

It's titled "I Am Not I," by Juan Ramon Jimenez, translated by Robert Bly. And it makes a distinction between, what I would call, the "little 'i'" or "ego and the "Larger 'I'" of "Self."

I'll give you two renderings of the poem:

I Am Not I

I am not I.
I am this one
Walking beside me whom I do not see,
Whom at times I manage to visit,
And whom at other times I forget;
The one who remains silent when I talk,
The one who forgives, sweet, when I hate,
The one who takes a walk where I am not,
The one who will remain standing when I die.
(Juan Ramon Jimenez, tr., Robert Bly, in *The Soul Is Here For Its Own Joy*, p. 246)

To emphasis the distinction I'm making between the "little 'i'" and the "Larger 'I'," here's how I would present this poem, adjusting the upper and lower cases where appropriate.

I Am Not i

I am not i.
I am this One
Walking beside me Whom i do not see,
Whom at times i manage to visit,
And Whom at other times i forget;
The One who remains silent when i talk,
The One who forgives, sweet, when i hate,
The One who takes a walk where i am not,
The One who will remain standing when i die.

So, these quotes speak to me of the relation of the ego, the "little 'i'" to the Self, the "Larger 'I'."

"Giving the ego its rights"

But just because we may speak of the "ego" as the smaller center of the psyche or the "little 'i'," doesn't mean it's unimportant. As John Sanford said in the quote I gave you a couple of minutes ago, "the ego is important, [just] not *the* most important thing."

And I might say it even more strongly, namely, that the "ego" is hugely important. It's the most distinctive feature of our species … and it's the level at which we live most of the time.

And, beyond this, without ego-consciousness we would not be consciously aware of "cosmic consciousness."

So, we do ourselves no favor by attempting to ignore, dismiss, or denigrate the "ego."

Thus, I like to speak of "giving the ego its rights" … that is, to allow – to encourage, actually – the "ego" to express its anxiety, its distress, its hurt, its weakness, its sorrow, its grief in the face of loss and death … and in the face of its own dissolution.

Loss and grief at memorial services

The first thing, for example, that I typically try to do in memorial services at which I officiate is to acknowledge the loss, and not miss that step of grief:

… not to try to be strong in the face of death,

… nor to try to move immediately to the Cosmic or Eternal,

… but first of all, to allow ourselves – that is, our ego-selves – to feel the pain of loss, the distress of regret,

… and to let ourselves, if necessary, be drenched by sorrow.

I believe that by allowing our ego-self its emotions, its fear, its sadness, and its grief, we are, then, in a position to open in a posture of surrender to the larger Self and to its connection to "cosmic consciousness."

Conclusion: Multiple methods for relating the "smaller 'i'" and the "Larger 'I'"

So, granting the "ego" its place, how do we relate and connect it to the deeper center of the psyche, the Self? How do we relate the "smaller 'i'" and the "Larger 'I'"?

And, let me ask you:

How do you connect your limited and finite being to Infinite Being?

How do you connect your "individual consciousness" to "cosmic consciousness"?

How do calm yourself, settle yourself, regain your balance when you in your ego-consciousness feel overwhelmed and at the end of your tether?

There are, of course, multiple methods and techniques, multiple spiritual paths and disciplines, for settling the ego and assisting it in connecting to a larger Reality beyond itself. I can mention:

meditation, prayer, yoga, the rosary;
journaling, dream-work, reading;
listening to or playing music;
dancing, walking, running, swimming, sailing,
singing, gardening, etc., etc.

I wouldn't want to limit the possibilities.

The role of nature

For myself, as for many others, being out in Nature is an aid in knowing my place and finding my proper place in the larger scheme of things.

The odd comfort – and, perhaps, you have felt it at times – in the experience of your finiteness and littleness in relation to the larger reality of Nature … as, for example, of visiting the Grand Canyon in Arizona:

… the immensity of that place,
… feeling the vastness of time in the layers of stone one on top of the other deposited over the millennia,
… you yourself might one day be a tiny particle in such a layer of stone,
… and it absolutely wipes you out,
… and yet as you behold its grandeur and beauty, how can you raise a complaint?
… It's okay.
… It's okay!

"The Peace of Wild Things"

In this regard, I'll close with a poem of author and environmentalist Wendell Berry, who died at his home in Port Royal, Kentucky this past August 31st at the age of 92. Here's a well-known poem he left us titled "The Peace of Wild Things":

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Closing Hymn #354: "We Laugh, We Cry"

1. We laugh, we cry, we live, we die; we dance, we sing our song.
We need to feel there's something here to which we can belong.
We need to feel the freedom just to have some time alone.
But most of all we need close friends we can call our very own.
And we believe in life, and in the strength of love;
and we have found a need to be together.
We have our hearts to give, we have our thoughts to receive;
and we believe that sharing is an answer.

2. A child is born among us and we feel a special glow.
We see time's endless journey as we watch the baby grow.
We thrill to hear imagination freely running wild.
We dedicate our minds and heart to the spirit of this child.
And we believe in life, and in the strength of love;
and we have found a time to be together.
And with the grace of age, we share the wonder of youth,
and we believe that growing is an answer.

3. Our lives are full of wonder and our time is very brief.
The death of one among us fills us all with pain and grief.
But as we live, so shall we die, and when our lives are done
the memories we shared with friends, they will linger on and on.
And we believe in life, and in the strength of love;
and we have found a place to be together.
We have the right to grow, we have the gift to believe
that peace within our living is an answer.

4. We seek elusive answers to the questions of this life.
We seek to put an end to all the waste of human strife.
We search for truth, equality, and blessed peace of mind.
And then, we come together here, to make sense of what we find.
And we believe in life, and in the strength of love,
and we have found a joy being together.
And in our search for peace, maybe we'll finally see:
even to question, truly is an answer.

(Words & music: Shelley Jackson Denham)

Closing Words of Benediction

Our Closing Words of Benediction are also from Wendell Berry:

We clasp the hands of those who go before us,
and the hands of those who come after us;
we enter the little circle of each other's arms,
and the larger circle of lovers whose hands are joined in a dance,
and the larger circle of all creatures, passing in and out of life,
who move also in a dance,
to a music so subtle and vast that no ear hears it except in fragments.

(Wendell Berry, from Good Work III, *What Are People For?*)

(NOTE: This is a manuscript version of the service led by the Rev. Bruce A. Bode at the Skagit Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Mt. Vernon, WA on Sunday, November 1, 2026.