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The First Congregational Church of Old Lyme
Texts: Philippians 4: 4-7; Romans 5: 3-5; Luke 10: 1
November 22, 2026

You Saw the Whole of the Moon

We'll begin today in the same place in which we'll end several minutes from now - with a vision of the moon.

Throughout this autumn season, I've been chasing the theme of love, looking at it through several different angles - romantic love, the love displayed by communities, and the love of what we tend to call God. But there's another kind of love that I wish to celebrate today, and that's the love we experience in friendship. For me, it's a song that captures best what it is to have friends in our lives. It's called "The Whole of the Moon," by an Irish band named The Waterboys. It may be one of my favorite songs of all time. Here are just a few lyrics:

I was grounded
While you filled the skies
I was dumbfounded by truth
You cut through lies
I saw the rain dirty valley
You saw Brigadoon
I saw the crescent
You saw the whole of the moon

I spoke about wings
You just flew
I wondered, I guessed, and I tried
You just knew
I sighed
But you swooned
I saw the crescent
You saw the whole of the moon

I believe that one of the greatest things that can happen throughout our lives is to find a friend. Discovering another person, or perhaps a small group of people, who help us to see the world more fully, who help us to pay attention to what we had scarcely noticed before, who encourage us to maintain perspective or focus when we're casting about - this is essential to our very personhood. When we see the crescent, they somehow see the whole of the moon. Have you had people in your life that have been that way for you?

I have. When I was fresh out of divinity school, I was working at a Presbyterian church outside of Philadelphia, and one week I put a notice in the bulletin asking if anyone wanted to join me on a multi-day backpacking expedition down to Shenandoah National Park. About ten people responded, and we had a magical experience. I was actually sort of depressed when it was over, because I just wanted to go on sharing conversations with those people, especially a core group of three or four individuals. And so we kept getting together - over dinners, yes, but

more often with packs on our backs and sitting around campfires in places like the Catskills, or the Delaware Water Gap, or once, out to Yosemite in California. For nearly thirty years now, these are friends that I've turned to when encountering the winds of life - feeling anxious about becoming a parent, feeling low during certain stretches of grad school, during times when I was struggling to recall those things I most value in life - human connection, real conversation, even faith itself. When I saw the crescent, they saw the whole of the moon, and I'm forever grateful to have them in my life.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus has a great deal to say about friendship. "I have called you friends," he tells his disciples in his final discourse. But it's a practice of friendship that he establishes in Luke's Gospel that most intrigues me. Jesus takes seventy of his followers, and sends them off in pairs to preach the gospel - two by two - into the surrounding towns and villages. In some of those places, the pair will be welcomed. In others, they'll be criticized, and rejected. We can imagine that there will be emotional highs and lows that they'll experience together, just as we each experience periods of consolation, and periods of desolation, in our lives. Jesus seems to be saying: don't try to go it alone. Have a friend or two by your side who can help you see the whole of the moon, when, in your despair, or loneliness, or sadness, you can see only a small crescent.

And isn't that what a faith community is? Isn't that what a church is supposed to be? All of us, a little lost, a little scared, a little uncertain, finding one another in order to say: do you know how much you are loved? Do you know that you're going to get through this? Do you know that you don't have to be afraid, or anxious, or alone, but that you can come here and simply exist, just as you are? You have been that to me, and I dare say you have been that to one another as well.

A few weeks ago, I went for a walk with a new friend, seated up here with us, Victor Slezak. We spoke of many things, about our work, about our yearnings, about our relationships. When we arrived back at his house, Victor said, "I want to share this with you." And he proceeded to read a poem in which the clouds parted, while the whole of the moon came into view. When he was through, I stood there kind of astonished, grateful for a new friend, and grateful for a poem that got to the broken heart of things, beyond our theologies and dogmas, beyond our ideologies and divisions, where we exist as fumbling human beings holding on to one another for all we're worth. I knew right away that I wanted you to hear it too. I asked Victor, "Would you consider reading that in church someday?" He said he'd think about it, but a little later he sent a text, and he said, "Whenever you're ready, I'd be glad to read that poem for the community."

Before he does, though, I simply want to say that, standing at the brink of another Thanksgiving holiday, what I am most grateful for are the people I'm blessed to have in my life. And I'm especially thankful for each of you. Some of you I know well. Some of you I would love to know better. You help me to see the whole of the moon. May we do that for one another.

All've It, by Matt Moberg,
read by Victor Slezak

I think every human being
eventually has a moment

where they are standing outside in sweatpants
that have lost the will to be pants,
holding a trash bag, a divorce, a parking ticket,
or some other receipt from the universe
that says, “surprise, this too is part of it.”

And then the sky bruises purple.

And the air touches your face
like it knows your whole story.

And suddenly you realize:

all the real is actually unreal.

The dirt.
The breath.
The weird little bones in your hands.
The fact that we are here,
on a floating rock with pollen counts,
paying bills,
missing dead people,
loving living people
who say “leaving now”
while still fully naked and looking for socks.

And still,
the moon clocks in.

No applause.
No benefits.
No note from management saying,
“Great work being ancient and luminous again.”

Just the moon,
working nights
like a single mother with no applause,
packing silver lunches
for every dark thing
that still has to rise.

Tell me that isn’t holy.
Tell me there is a better word
than sacred
for the way light keeps returning
with no guarantee
we will actually stop and take note.

I know people who believe in therapy,
probiotics,
tarot,
twelve-step meetings,
manifestation journals,
and waiting exactly eleven minutes
before texting back
so they do not appear emotionally available,
even though their whole nervous system
is standing in the driveway holding flowers.

And underneath all of it,
every ritual,
every doctrine,
every smoothie with chia seeds,
the prayer is the same:

Please let me be loved.
Please let me be forgiven.
Please let this strange little life
mean something
before my lower back
submits its formal resignation.

What is going on?

For real tho—What is this place?

This unbearable tenderness
of being alive long enough
to watch steam lift from coffee in winter
like a soul practicing leaving.

To see your friend laugh so hard
they slap the table
as if joy is a mosquito
they are trying to kill.

To hear a child say “pisghetti”
and, for one shining second,
realize language
has finally been improved.

I know I already noted this in the first piece,
but the older I get,
the less use I have for certainty.

Certainty has never made me pull over
because the sunset looked like God
dropped a jar of peach jam
across the whole midwestern sky
and decided to be lazy
and not clean up.

Certainty has never made me gasp
at rain on hot pavement.

Certainty has never found me
in the cereal aisle,
holding Captain Crunch,
suddenly remembering
that everyone I have ever loved
was made from stardust,
hunger,
and a series of decisions
we probably should have slept on.

No.
It has always been awe.

Awe was the first church.

Before steeples.
Before committees.
Before men got involved
and started making rules about skirts.

Awe was there
with its wild hair
and muddy feet,
saying:

Look.
Look again.
Look until looking
becomes love.

Awe, and soup.

Awe, and someone rubbing your back
when you are sick.

Awe, and old couples at Target
arguing gently about avocados,
as if marriage is not one vow
but ten thousand errands
performed beside the person
who knows exactly
how you like the cart pushed.

Maybe gratitude
was never meant to sound elegant.

Maybe gratitude sounds like:

“Damn.
That woodpecker is trying
to beat that tree from itself.”

Maybe gratitude sounds like:

“Thank you, body,

for continuing to drag me through this world
despite the many slim jims
I have done to you
at gas stations."

Maybe gratitude sounds like:

"Thank you to the dogs
who lose their entire minds
when we come home
as if we have returned from war
and not Walgreens."

For me, that might be my gospel.

That joy that does not wait for us
to be impressive but only needs us
to come through the door.

Because the truth is,
this life is devastating.

And ridiculous.

One minute you are 22 and invincible,
driving too fast,
eating gas station nachos
with the confidence of a Greek god.

The next minute you are googling,
"Can sneezing cause a hamstring injury?"
and the answer is,
apparently,
"Welcome to the second half of your life."

But even now—

even tired,
even grieving,
even emotionally held together

by iced coffee, playlists,
and one very specific wolves hoodie—

we keep finding reasons
to stay soft.

We plant tomatoes
even though grief is real.

We bake bread
even though the news is on fire.

We send photos of the sky
to people we love
with captions like,
“LOOK,”
as if beauty is an emergency
and we are all volunteer firefighters.

We keep saying,
“You have to see this,”
because wonder
is the oldest form
of resurrection.

So here’s to the believers
and the atheists
and the agnostics
and the people whose entire theology
is just trying not to cry
in the DMV line.

Here’s to the people clinging to faith.

Here’s to the people clinging to Xanax
and oat milk
and the one group chat
where nobody pretends to be okay.

Here’s to the tender-hearted weirdos.

The accidental mystics.

The ones who can contemplate mortality
for six straight hours
and then become emotionally attached
to a perfect peach.

The ones who know
despair has a mouth,
but so does laughter.

May we never stop being drop-kicked by beauty
in the middle of a Sunday afternoon.

May we never become so polished
that we forget how to stand
in the Starbucks line of existence
with our dumb, gorgeous hearts open,
feeling the enormity of it all
rattle around in our bones
like thunder
looking for somewhere to laugh.

And may we remember:

whatever else this is,
whatever mess,
whatever miracle,
whatever cosmic group project
no one was prepped for—

all’ve it is astonishing.
that we are here.
that we have loved enough to be ruined.
that the moon keeps showing up.
that bread exists.

So pass it on.

Tear off a piece
with your bare hands.

Take it in as you take it down.

And then go outside and look at that moon.

Matt Moberg