Aug 23 Sermon Outline
At the Threshold

- Opening
    - an unnamed day (Buttered Corn Day)
        - Seasonal calendar: today falls roughly midway between Lughnasadh and Mabon
        - No festival *owns* this day
            - Contrast: how much weight/importance gets placed on holidays
    - NOT the homecoming service
        - special feeling of return has already worn off
        - we're just here again, on an unremarkable Sunday
    - The unremarkable isn't empty
        - It's a threshold
            - that's where most of the real stuff happens
            - both in the calendar and in our lives
    - the struggles many of us are carrying didn't pause
        - over the summer
        - since last Sunday
        - we walked in still carrying them
        - we're at our own thresholds!
    - What IS a threshold? Maybe it's personal:
        - a diagnosis
        - becoming a caregiver
        - watching the people you love change in ways you didn't expect
    - Or maybe it's civic:
        - deciding how long to stay engaged in activism or civic work vs stepping back
        - wondering whether to hand off leadership roles to a younger generation

        - most of us are carrying real fear and exhaustion about how federal power is being abused today
            - worn down by watching power used in horrific ways
    - Or even spiritual
        - beliefs shifting quietly with age
            - not in a crisis, just a reconsideration
- Threshold as its own kind of sacred
    - Pagan concept of the threshold
        - doorways, dusk, the space between worlds
        - crossroads
        - places where boundaries thin
        - burying witch bottles at household threshold
        - Many pantheons have deities guarding threshold spaces
            - Janus (Roman)
                - beginnings, endings, doorways
            - Hecate (Greek)
                - choices, liminal spaces
        - Hero's Journey (Joseph Campbell): threshold guardians
            - Sphinx (Egyptian)
            - Cerberos (Greek)
            - Natural obstacles (mountain, river, etc)
        - Folklore
            - carrying bride across threshold (Roman)
        - Hávamál's opening stanzas
            - The man who stands at a strange threshold,
              Should be cautious before he cross it,
              Glance this way and that:
              Who knows beforehand what foes may sit
              Awaiting him in the hall?

            - Greetings to the host,
              The guest has arrived,
              In which seat shall he sit?

Rash is he who at unknown doors
Relies on his good luck.

        - look before you enter
        - check the doorway
        - note - you don't know who's already inside
    - advice for an utterly ordinary act (walking into a house)
        - treated with the same seriousness as any cosmic threshold
    - humble doorway earns the same reverence as other things much grander
- Anthropologist Victor Turner's "liminality"
    - derived from the Latin limen meaning "threshold"
    - describes the ambiguous, "betwixt and between" middle stage of a rite of passage
        - where normal social structures, identities, and rules are temporarily suspended
    - Three stages of transition
        - Separation
            - you're cut off from your old social status and everyday life
        - Liminality (the threshold)
            - ambiguous transitional state where you have left one identity behind but not yet entered the next
        - Reaggregation
            - you re-enter society with new status and identity
    - Key features of the Threshold stage
        - Ambiguity
            - you have no clear status, rank, or cultural role

                - example: attending your first meeting with a new group
            - Communitas
                - deep, equal, and intense feeling of community and comradeship develops among those sharing the threshold
                    - example: others are also there for the first time
            - Anti-Structure
                - temporary break from regular laws, politics, and economic competition
                    - example: you don't know how to act yet
    - Why does any of this matter?
        - Because "threshold" is where we are today
            - struggles are ongoing
            - end results seem difficult to grasp
            - hope is too often challenging
            - exhaustion seems prevalent
    - Threshold is the natural home for exhaustion
        - thresholds in myth are often demanding
            - require a keeper, a vigil, a watch
            - or a challenge, an ordela
        - vigilance is tiring
            - real cost
            - not a failure of resolve
    - Struggle and exhaustion sit side by side at threshold
        - no resolving one into the other
        - committed and tired, at once
- Again - why do we care? Why respect this in-between at all?
    - because the in-between is not a waiting room
        - it's the only place where change actually gets made
    - sustained resistance rarely has dramatic turning points
        - most carried through long, unmarked stretches

- Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–56)
    - Dec 5, 1955: Monday after Rosa Parks was arrested for her refusal to surrender her seat to a white person
    - 381 days: ordinary people walking, carpooling, organizing rides
    - some dramatic moments
        - but mostly just sustained daily logistics
    - That liminal stretch wasn't a delay before the win
        - It ***was*** the win being built, day by unremarkable day
    - Dec 20, 1956: Browder v. Gayle (SCOTUS) Court declared Alabama and Montgomery laws that segregated buses were unconstitutional
    - Reality check
        - Not every person who walked in Montgomery eventually rode an integrated bus
            - That didn't make the walking pointless
            - It made it foundational
                - created the basis
    - Walkers weren't sustained by a promise they'd personally see the ending
        - Sustained by that day's walk being worth doing on its own terms
    - That's a different, perhaps more durable, kind of hope than waiting to see a personal finish line
    - Many of us have already lived through long unglamorous struggles—or thresholds—that eventually resolved
        - We earn hope from our own experience
            - not a borrowed promise
- Liminality in UU's own theological posture
    - comfort with the in-between
    - resistance to premature closure
    - "Living Tradition" language as a liminal stance
        - always in motion
        - never fully arrived

        - never demanding false resolution
        - meaning is drawn from many sources
            - not a single sanctioned doctrine
    - Okay to hold some things unresolved
        - We don't need a fully resolved political situation to have peace here
        - We don't need to hide exhaustion to still be seen as committed
    - Odysseus
        - Penelope's threshold
            - delays 108 aggressive suitors for 3 of the 20 years absence of her husband
            - claims she will choose a new husband only after she finishes weaving a burial shroud for her father-in-law, Laertes
            - secretly unpicks the shroud every night to stall for time
            - Weaving and unweaving allows her to suspend time and protect her home
    - Calls to action when you're feeling frozen at the threshold
        - Look before you enter (Hávamál)
            - recall the threshold examples mentioned earlier
            - take one honest inventory sometime this week
                - what am I about to step into?
                - am I really looking first, or just standing frozen in the doorway pretending stillness is safety?
            - name one thing you've been avoiding looking at squarely
                - look at it, don't solve it
            - physically or symbolically mark where you are
                - don't wait for something dramatic to happen
                    - acknowledge the threshold
        - Tend the hearth, don't wait for a special day

    - Norns work in that liminal space *between*
        - continuous, not dramatic
        - shape one unremarkable day after another
            - nothing is a pause from Wyrd (Fate)
    - commit to one small, unglamorous, daily act of care
        - for self, family, community, or the causes they're carrying
        - not a grand gesture, just consistent tending
        - keep doing the next small thing that's yours to do, regardless of whether you feel resolved
            - Motion doesn't require certainty
        - antidote to feeling stuck isn't a burst of energy, it's permission to take the next small step tired
- Cross with someone (communitas)
    - name one of your thresholds to one other person this week
        - small act of not staying isolated in the in-between
- Reframe
    - being at a threshold NOT the same as being stuck
        - threshold is inherently in motion
        - Hávamál's doorway-advice assumes you're about to step through, not camp out in the frame
        - threshold is where work actively happens
    - just like Penelope putting off the suitors with every night's unweaving
    - just like Montgomery's walkers building the outcome with every ordinary day's walk
- Closing image
    - Showing up on this unremarkable day, mid-struggle, mid-threshold, mid-exhaustion, is itself a sacred act