Sep 13, 2026 Sermon Outline
Not From Nothing
(Soul Matters: Beginnings)

The Day Itself as a Living Myth

- Welcome to the "...ber" months
- Equinox: day and night in exact balance
    - Balance is temporary by nature
    - equinox isn't a resting point, it's the moment before the tip
    - from here forward, night starts winning
- Soul Matters theme: beginnings
    - But Mabon complicates the idea of a “beginning”
        - feels like an ending
        - field is harvested
        - leaves fall
        - garden dies back
    - harvest is simultaneously an ending and the material from which the next cycle begins
        - field, leaves, garden are composted
        - seeds are saved
            - seeds are literally the future contained inside the remains of the present
- Beginning is already hiding inside the ending

Two Families of Creation Story

- Something from nothing — Genesis:
    - The earth was without form and void... and God said, let there be light
    - a beginning spoken directly into formlessness, with no prior ending to dismantle
    - Some beginnings are simply spoken into being
- Something from...something else
    - Enuma Elish (Babylonian)
        - Marduk (storm god) battles Tiamat (dragon-goddess)
            - splits her body to form sky and earth

        - Tiamat represents the older chaos
        - Cosmic order is only possible once she's decisively overthrown
            - not gradually eased out
    - Norse
        - Void between fire (Muspelheim) and Ice (Niflheim)
            - Creation begins where two opposing forces meet
        - World built from Ymir's body after his death
            - mountains from his bones
            - trees from his hair
            - clouds from his brains
            - earth from flesh
            - oceans from blood
            - heavens from skull
    - Ymir's death
        - Odin, Vili, and Ve
        - not a battle
            - also not passive transformation
        - destruction as deliberate act
            - makes creation possible
            - But this is not the message!
                - when a creation story makes order dependent on defeating a monster
                - We can resist something fiercely without thinking that people on the other side are monsters
    - Hindu
        - Rigveda
        - cosmic being Purusha is *self*-sacrificed
        - the world emerges from that sacrifice
        - different from Tiamat and Ymir
            - the old is not merely destroyed; it is given

    - Different cultures tell different stories, but several imagine creation as transformation
        - The cosmos is crafted from *something*

Dismantling and transformation

- old form undone, taken apart
    - its pieces become something new
- Battle/ violence is not required
    - but *undoing* makes it possible
- This is the more common shape of beginnings
    - Something entrenched: a form, a structure, an old idea
        - has to be dismantled before what's next can take shape
        - entrenched, worn-out forms often need to be let go of, actively and sometimes uncomfortably, before something better can take their place
- Real-world examples
    - controlled burn clearing dead undergrowth so healthier growth can follow
    - composting, where old material is fully broken down to feed what comes next
- We rarely begin from *nothing*
    - We begin from what's been left to us:
        - what has died
        - what has failed
        - what has been harvested
        - what has been broken
        - what has been given
- Modern examples
    - Post-industrial urban districts
        - old factories, mills, warehouses sitting derelict for years
            - converted to breweries, artist studios, maker spaces

        - entrenched industrial economy had to fully end in a place
            - then something new could be built inside its bones
    - High Line (NYC)
        - abandoned elevated freight rail line, decayed and useless, slated for demolition
        - instead of being torn down and forgotten, its physical structure was repurposed into a public park
- Sometimes the beginning doesn't look like a beginning
    - Grief doesn't look like a beginning
    - Retirement doesn't
    - Divorce
    - Leaving a community
    - Admitting that something you believed no longer works
- Sometimes the first step toward the new is simply acknowledging that the old has ended
    - no false resolution required
        - a beginning doesn't erase what it's made from

What to Build From the Ruins

- What in your life is already a ruin?
    - old habit, outdated assumption, structure that no longer serves
    - could you actually build something new from that, rather than just mourning or ignoring it?
- Let go
    - Identify one thing to let go of
    - Not destroy dramatically, just stop propping up
- Build from what's left
    - What are you building from?
        - What are you standing on that used to be something else?"
            - Failures
            - Grief

            - Old identities
            - Lessons
            - Relationships
            - Traditions
            - People who taught us
        - think about your life as a kind of compost heap
            - Not what new thing are you going to accomplish
            - but what do you already have that can become the material for your next beginning?
    - Possibilities
        - The remains of mistakes:
            - failed project, bad decision, relationship that didn't work, an organizing effort that fizzled
            - Don't ask "How do I undo that?"
            - ask: What can this failure teach me that success never could?
        - Once something is let go of, what's the "ruin" it leaves behind that's actually usable?
            - A skill from an old job
            - A friendship changed but not ended
            - A belief revised, not abandoned
        - The remains of former selves
            - we don't remain one person throughout our lives
                - person you were at 20 is gone
                - person you were before a major loss
                - person you were before coming out, changing careers, becoming a parent, leaving a religion, joining a religion, discovering activism, or simply growing older
            - we don't have to resurrect our former selves in order to honor them
            - Some part of them becomes bone in the architecture of who we are now

        - Creation myths: the past isn't just behind us
            - it is part of the structure we're standing on today
        - The past as fertile ground
            - Mabon: the fallen leaf isn't a failure of the tree
                - it is the tree's contribution to the soil from which another season will grow
            - One task of grief is learning that we don't have to make the dead come alive again
                - We can let what they gave us become part of the life that continues
            - That can encompass people, traditions, relationships, and lost possibilities
        - Categories
            - Preserve: what deserves to survive?
            - Transform: what needs to become something different?
            - Compost: what has served its purpose?

Community

- What's true in your own life is true at the scale of a nation
    - nothing good gets built from a government by wishing the old one into nonexistence
        - good gets built the way Ymir's world was built
            - by dismantling, piece by piece, what no longer serves
            - by using what's usable to build something better
- Let go
    - beliefs can actually make people passive:
        - nothing can change
        - engagement doesn't matter
        - waiting quietly is the safest civic posture
    - *beliefs* are what to dismantle
        - not the government itself
        - the learned helplessness around it
- Build from what's left

    - Every protest movement was built from *something*
        - existing church networks
        - existing relationships
        - existing community trust
    - What ruin can we build from?
        - What infrastructure, relationship, or skills do we already have?
        - a congregation, a professional network, a mailing list, a skillset?
        - becomes material for organized civic response, the way the old rail became the High Line
- Do it in company
    - civic action is nearly always structurally collective
    - protest against entrenched power rarely works as a solitary act
        - it's networks of ordinary people, doing unglamorous logistics together
    - civic "dismantling" is about unjust laws, policies, and structures
        - voting, organizing, legal challenge, civic pressure
        - NOT about making people into targets
    - Activists sometimes talk about "building a better world" as though the task were to construct something brand new
        - community organizers know better
        - You build from:
            - existing relationships
            - existing institutions
            - existing knowledge
            - previous campaigns
            - previous failures
            - stories handed down by earlier generations
            - people who've been doing this for decades
            - infrastructure somebody else created
            - laws won by people who came before

                - movements that lost but left behind lessons
                - movements that won and left behind institutions
    - We inherit unfinished worlds.
        - We are not inventing justice from scratch
            - We inherit struggles
            - We inherit victories
            - We inherit failures
            - We inherit songs, marches, laws, organizations, stories, tactics, and courage
            - And someday, somebody will inherit us
                - We are not the first people to begin
        - it may feel as though everything depends on what we do right now
        - But every generation has experienced a version of:
            - Surely *this* is the moment everything is falling apart
        - And every generation has also inherited tools from people who struggled before them
            - suffragists inherited abolitionist organizing
            - Civil rights organizers inherited Reconstruction-era struggles and Black mutual-aid traditions
            - Labor movements inherited generations of organizing before them
            - Queer liberation movements inherited earlier resistance
            - Environmental movements inherited conservation movements and Indigenous ecological knowledge
    - Work we inherit is not a burden placed on us by the dead
        - It is a gift placed in our hands
        - what will we leave in the hands of people who come after us?
    - Mabon: harvest is inherently about future generations
        - You don't plant wheat to admire it

        - You plant so someone, sometime later, can eat.
    - Resistance alone doesn't tell us what we're trying to make
        - A protest sign might say: NO
            - Every meaningful "no" contains a "yes" waiting to be articulated
            - No to cruelty → yes to care
            - No to authoritarianism → yes to shared power
            - No to exclusion → yes to belonging
            - No to environmental destruction → yes to a livable world
            - No to political violence → yes to human dignity
        - Prepare to transition from protest to creation
            - invitation to imagine beyond resistance
            - What are we saying yes to?
            - the ruins are not the blueprint

The Pivot Turns

- Equinox lesson
    - balance is not something we hold onto
    - it's something we pass through.
- Whatever begins today, it's carrying everything left unresolved
    - exhaustion, ongoing struggle, no guaranteed endings
    - not a flaw in the beginning
        - just what a real beginning is made of
- Beginnings are acts of transformation
    - not acts of creation from nothing
- No need to wait for the world to become empty before we begin building the world we want
    - The remains of the old world can become the foundations of the new
        - but foundations are not blueprints

    - We'll inherit institutions, assumptions, habits, language, prejudices, organizational structures, and cultural stories
    - We shouldn't simply preserve them because they're familiar
    - We have to decide what deserves to become foundation
- Categories:
    - What will we preserve?
    - What will we transform?
    - What will we compost?
    - And what are we beginning now that someone else may someday harvest?
- Mabon is a harvest festival, but harvest isn't the end of the story
    - A seed is not an ending
    - A seed is a beginning
        - disguised as something small and apparently inert
- Closing
    - We gather what has grown
    - We give thanks for what fed us
    - We mourn what has fallen
    - We return some things to the earth
    - We save some things for another season
    - And then, in the dark, we begin again
    - Not from nothing
        - But from everything that came before