

Making Room for What's Next

Rev. Jane Willan · October 2026 · The Parsonage Desk

Every autumn, the trees do something I am not very good at: they let go. They do it without fuss, without committee meetings, without forming a task force to study whether this particular leaf is still serving an important purpose. The leaves simply turn, loosen, and fall.

Gardens do the same thing. By October, the tomatoes are mostly finished, the flowers are looking tired, and those of us who are responsible gardeners—which does not always include me—begin cutting things back and clearing things away. Autumn reminds us that not everything is meant to be held forever.

Churches, on the other hand, can be very good at holding on. And that is not always a bad thing. We hold onto traditions because they connect us to people who came before us. We sing hymns that someone else sang fifty years ago. We worship in a building filled with memories. We tell old stories because they still have something to say to us.

Some things deserve to be held tightly.

But faithfulness is not the same thing as keeping everything exactly the way it has always been. I've been thinking lately that perhaps the challenge is learning the difference between roots and leaves.

Roots are what keep us grounded. They give us life. For us, those roots might include our faith, our commitment to love our neighbors, our care for one another, our welcome, and our desire to serve the wider community. Those things matter deeply.

Leaves are different. Leaves have a season. Programs have seasons. Traditions have seasons. Ways of doing things have seasons. Even ideas about what church is supposed to look like can have a season. Sometimes, if we hold too tightly to every leaf, we leave no room for anything new to grow.

That feels especially important for us right now. There are new possibilities around us: new ways our building can serve the community, new people stepping into leadership, new conversations about accessibility, care for the earth, children and families, and how our church might continue to be a place of welcome and belonging.

Making room for what comes next does not mean rejecting what came before. It means asking what needs to remain rooted and what we might be ready to release.

We often say that we want new people to come to church. But real welcome asks something of us. New people do not simply fill empty seats. They bring new questions, new ideas, new needs, and new gifts. They may not do things exactly the way we have always done them, and that is part of the gift.

If we truly make room for others, then we also make room for the possibility that their presence will shape us.

That takes some trust. Maybe that is one of the lessons of autumn. A tree lets go of its leaves before there is any sign of spring. It does not get to see the new growth first.

Neither do we.

We do not have to know exactly what comes next. We do not need a perfect plan for the next five or ten years. Sometimes faith simply means making a little room.

So perhaps these are good October questions for us: What are the roots we need to tend carefully? What leaves might we be ready to release? And who—or what—might God be asking us to make room for next?

Faith is not only about holding on. Sometimes faith is trusting enough to make room.

See you in the pews,

Rev. Jane