

**Minister's Message for October 8, 2020**  
**First Congregational Church UCC of Burlington**

Dear Friends –

It is now official: my daughter's first word (at least the one that is comprehensible to someone other than Sarah and me) is "uh oh". I shouldn't be surprised; it is 2020 after all.

She knows what it means, and uses it appropriately – for the most part. It is an exclamation of surprise when something doesn't go as she expects, an expression of frustration when her chubby fingers drop precious cargo, a call for help when she cannot complete a task on her own. It is even an expression of sadness when she sees someone upset – her over-wide eyes, blinking rapidly, turn the "uh oh" into a question, almost as if she is asking, "Mommy uh oh?"



There are, of course, definitely those times when she dramatically throws something on the floor (broccoli, for example) and then coyly smiles an "uh oh" that simply dares you to tell her she is wrong. We've tried telling her that "'uh oh' is for accidents," but not only do I know that she doesn't understand what we are saying, *I also think she just might be right.*

Perhaps 2020 is a year of "uh oh" – not the accident kind, but the kind where we realize that we have allowed things to crumble, and then have to pretend to be surprised when they break. Racial injustice, poverty, democratic systems, health care, hunger – the list is long.

I know you are tired, friends. I know you are worried – fearful, even – of the next few months. I feel acutely now, more than ever, the benediction by the Rev. Philipps Brooks that I use frequently: the need to pray "not for tasks equal to your powers, but powers equal to your tasks."

But therein, I believe, rests the promise of this moment: that there will come a time – many, many moons from now – when we will be able to say, with a sense of pride, and maybe, just maybe, a touch of gratitude, that we were a part of this time. This time that committed to the un-doing of generations of structural neglect, even sin. In other words, I have hope that we will come to see this year as a cross – one that we are called to carry together – that brought forth a resurrection that was unlike anything we could have anticipated.

I also have hope that, when Carolyn is older, we will be able to laugh about how her little, one-year-old self was able to capture the zeitgeist of an era in a single word. And from her comes,

just perhaps, one more lesson: when she starts throwing things to the floor, an awful lot of things can get broken that weren't intended. When it happens, usually it means a nap is in order.

I say this NOT to make light of the moment (really!). But to remind us that to do the real, challenging, discerning work of this time, we must take care of ourselves.

So, beloveds, make sure you rest.

Because 2020 is the year of the "uh-oh". It is likely to present some of the greatest challenges of our very lifetimes. But also, therefore, the greatest opportunities. And for that, I am grateful.

In faith,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elissa".

[The Rev. Elissa Johnk](#), Lead Minister