Good evening and welcome

I would like to thank Pastor Jocelyn for her warm welcome here and Tiokasin for his generous opening remarks. It is a pleasure to thank my co-organizer of this program, Marika Kuzma, who was introduced to me by Bill McKibben who urged us to create something together. Bill is a friend I can never refuse! So, he is the real grandfather of this event, which is in preparation for the September 20th Climate Strikes in New Haven and Hartford and all across the country.

Let me explain my title “Connecting the Dots: A Great Awakening”.

“Connecting the dots” is to remind us that there are so many initiatives and efforts in place that our task now is to connect the dots regarding our climate emergency, leading toward genuine transformation across many different sectors, for example, from science to education to religion. New climate alliances are emerging and great activism is arising. As institutions and disciplines are breaking down we are also breaking through to new forms of creativity and resistance.

The second phrase in my title is to remind us that Yale produced a remarkable graduate, Jonathan Edwards, who 200 years ago sparked the Great Awakening with his impassioned preaching. While largely a religious movement, his love of nature was spread throughout his writings. This is the awakening I am pointing to tonight – toward an unstoppable love for life and its future flourishing.

I want to suggest that we are on the verge of a “A Greater Awakening”. Namely, we are poised to awaken to our role as humans on an endangered planet and to our tender hopes as parents and as teachers for the next generations. My husband and I do not have children, but we feel our students are our children. This evening is
devoted to them and to all the youth of today and tomorrow. Surely our love for them will be crucial, especially as we hear from them tonight with their own hopes and dreams in the Sunrise Movement, a Green New Deal, Fossil Free Yale, divestment, and more.

Those hopes are the basis for the solidarity we celebrate this evening – namely, a broadened consciousness for a deeper conscience that embraces future generations for the whole Earth community. In this time of great upheaval, we are moving into a place where we identify not just as citizens of a city, state, or country, but as Earth citizens, something our parents could not have fully envisioned, but we can now. Truly a greater awakening may be at hand, a larger embrace is possible, despite signs to the contrary.

Idealistic, no doubt, but I want to give some examples of constructive alliances emerging behind the tsunami of sad bad news.

Let me illustrate the way the dots are being connected in the arenas of science, education, and religion.

Science is moving from just presenting facts on the climate crisis to more active engagement with solutions. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has given us reports for 15 years on the growing threat we are facing. But scientists have been reluctant to move toward advocacy or activism. I saw this when I sat for 10 years on the board of Climate Central in Princeton. Caution reigned and advocacy was avoided. However, in the last several years, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) with a membership of over 120,000 scientists, has encouraged them to speak out and march out on the climate emergency. And so they are, with great courage and tenacity. Along with the Union of Concerned Scientists, they are leading the way.

Many of these scientists are trying to help education respond to the climate crisis as well. For example, the entire University of California system, the largest in the country, is launching online classes on climate change with the backing of the Chancellor. Called Bending the Curve, this effort is being led by the atmospheric scientist, Ram Ramanathan and his colleague, Nobel Laureate, Mario Molina who discovered the ozone hole. These distinguished scientists have made every effort to include the natural and social sciences as well as the humanities. They observe that as climate change has morphed into massive climate disruption, environmental ethics and climate justice need to be brought into the discussions. They acknowledge that science alone can’t solve these problems. Thus, they have
brought our Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology in to the preparations for their online book and course. Their colleague Fonna Forman is at Yale this semester bringing forward this integrated approach regarding climate justice.

These same scientists are encouraging religious communities to provide a moral force for the great awakening – so that the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor can be heard. This phrase is at the heart of Pope Francis’s Encyclical letter *Laudato Si, On Care for our Common Home*. Issued in May 2015 many people feel this letter played a critical role in getting the Paris Agreement. Pope Francis is calling for an ecological conversion, a great awakening if you will. Bill McKibben feels this letter is the most important document of the 21st century. This is because the Pope speaks of an integral ecology uniting people and the planet for eco-justice. This is clearly aligned with the work we have been doing as well in the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology for the last 25 years.

So if the dots can be connected between science, education, and religion there are other links emerging as well.

The American Medical Association (AMA) has declared climate change a health emergency and in June approved a policy where the climate health risks would be incorporated into medical education. This ranges from studying insect borne diseases, to heat related illnesses, to trauma from climate related disasters, such as we are seeing with the effects of Hurricanes Dorian, Maria, Sandy, and Katrina. Our colleague, Rob Dubrow, here at Yale’s School of Public Health is doing this work with his Climate Change Health Initiative.

In the same way, food production is being threatened by climate change as we see in the vast flooding that occurred in the Midwest recently. People are struggling to adapt as arable land is being lost to flooding, drought, and other climate related destruction. Similarly, food and animal issues are being studied in Yale’s new Law, Ethics, and Animals Program. Connecting the dots means linking health and food to the growing problems caused by climate change.

Finally, two examples of connecting the dots that will be helpful for discussions with those who are still deniers of the facts regarding the climate crisis.

First, the Department of Defense (DOD) has been issuing reports since 2007 stating that climate change is a national security issue. Their most recent report in January of this year again notes that all of the US naval bases are being threatened by rising seas. The largest naval base in the world in Norfolk Virginia is
particularly subject to flooding, leading to difficulty getting on and off the base. No amount of sea walls can stop this relentless rise of water. If the Department of Defense is aware of these risks and taking the science seriously why are their reports not picked up in the news?

Second, this past April at their annual shareholder meeting, the CEO of Chubb Insurance, Evan Greenberg, named climate change an “existential threat”. He declared that Chubb would be unlikely to insure many coastal water properties or flood and fire prone areas. He cited the huge losses that insurance companies are absorbing. In the last 3 years climate disasters have cost $650 billion dollars around the world and the brunt of that is in the US at $400 billion. Insurance will simply not be possible for the companies or affordable for ordinary citizens. Moreover, as Morgan Stanley has warned, “these disruptions present risks to many sectors of the economy” in the trillions of dollars.

So the Greater Awakening that we are experiencing is because the dots are being connected between science, education, and religion, between climate related health and food issues, and between climate change risks for the military and for insurance.

The Greater Awakening is from our slumber of denial and fear to engagement and action, from disempowerment to empowerment. This is a moment in history with greater challenges than any other. Indeed, as many people are saying, The future of life - human and natural is at risk.

So we are called to seize the moment, to give our all for future generations, and to offer our actions as simple gifts to Mother Earth.

This evening is a moment where town and gown join in renewed efforts to unite research and practice, and where elders reach out to youth in an intergenerational handshake. Your voices matter, your concerns are real, your hopes are to be honored. And may our words and our music tonight bring us renewed inspiration for the awakening to the great work ahead.