

Genesis 1:26-2:4a

Preached for Stone Church of Willow Glen via Zoom by Rev. Samantha Evans

September 13, 2020

God and Us

Welcome, again, my dear friends to this service of worship. I must say that this is the first time I have prerecorded a sermon, and it feels kind of weird, but I am hoping that we will can feel a sense of vulnerability and authenticity. That going forward this doesn't feel like a production or performance, but a genuine labor of love and a way to extend and experience the grace of God. We are living in strange times, my friends, and what I am most needing is the love, the peace, the clarity which comes from experiencing the grace of God in community.

Today is the first Sunday in a three-part sermon series titled Rediscovery Connection. I took week of study leave in mid-August with the intention to study, read, and practice *connection* for the purpose of building this series.

As the quarantine and global pandemic drag on indefinitely, I've been noticing that my energy stores are really, really low. And the ways in which I have learned to recharge my batteries are so rooted in physical proximity to spaces and to people I love. And yeah, zoom is keeping us connected, but there is still a sense of loss and an experience of grief because we cannot be physically together.

We cannot hold hands. We cannot give one another a hug. We cannot receive and pass the elements of Communion. We cannot feel the energy we exude when we're singing in the sanctuary or running in the garden.

And our energy stores are going to run dry before we are able to do these things again. Which tells me that we have two options: we either resign ourselves, shrivel up, and keep moving at these dangerously low energy levels OR we find new ways to charge those batteries. New ways to care for one another. New ways to offer grace to one another. New ways to connect to one another.

In a way this feels scary and overwhelming. In a way it feels like the start-up cost is too high. In a way it feels like we're already too tired to imagine new ways of connecting. But, I feel a pretty deep sense of conviction that if we don't make this investment, we will perish.

In my week of study leave, I rediscovered or remembered an eternal truth. And that is that we are inexplicably intertwined. All of Creation, the entire universe, all of matter and movement and Spirit and life are interconnected. We spend a lot of time as individuals and as a society building metaphorical and literal walls that make it

hard to perceive this Truth. We spend a lot of time conforming, actively or forcibly, into distinct boxes and molds which keep us from remembering the Truth.

We are interconnected. This sermon series is about remembering, rediscovering connection. And today we begin with this truth, as a way to build a foundation, a given set of values that will help us to find new answers, new solutions to recharging our batteries and restoring our connection.

We begin by remembering the Truth about ourselves and our God. And so obviously, we begin in the beginning, when God was creating the heavens and the earth. Bringing form to a formless void, separating day from night, waters from waters, and land from sea. And after creating sea creatures and land animals, and vegetation of many varieties, God chose to create humankind in God's image.

There is so much to unpack in this particular Creation story, and I promise one day I will lead a whole bible study about both Creation stories which exist back to back in Genesis. But for today, I want to focus on who our God is and who our God made us to be.

So first to who God is. Close readers might have noticed that when God speaks about creating humankind, God says, "Let us create in our image." This has captured the imagination of professional and amateur scholars for millennia. And there are many theories about what this means, what the writers meant to convey to their audience, and what inherent truth might exist for us today.

Again, in our future Bible study, we will get into all of that. But today, I want to connect this understanding or portrayal of God to the doctrine of the Trinity, which can be and has been interpreted in a variety of ways. But the way in which I have come to connect to assertion about God is by understanding the Triune God as a God living in perfect communion with Godself.

Theologian Daniel Migliore writes that the Triune God reveals to us that:

God is not the supreme will-to-power over others but the supreme will-to-communion in which power and life are shared...The power of the triune God is not coercive but creative, sacrificial, and empowering love; and the glory of the triune God consists not in dominating others but in sharing life with others.

God the Father (or Creator, Parent); God the Son (Savior, Child); and God the Holy Spirit (Divine Life Source, animating breath). This Triune God, living in perfect communion, distinct but one. Separate but interconnected.

Migliore goes on to say that, “The **divine life is social.**” Who God is and how God exists in relationship to God and to the Cosmos is social and connected, made of the same stuff, one with all.

This might feel a little woo-woeey or too spiritual or out there for some of you. So, let me put my physicist hat on for a second to say it in another way: matter is made from the same building blocks of protons, neutrons, quarks and electrons, which come together to form atoms. That’s pretty much all matter that we can see, made from the same basic building blocks.

All living things on Earth are made up of carbon compounds, which are compounds that contain carbon bonded to hydrogen. You can add other elements to make things fancy and distinct, but all life, all living things contain those two basic elements.

We are made of the same stuff. Formed from the same raw material. Separated and distinct, but one.

“The divine life is social...” says Migliore, and “is thus the source and power of inclusive community among creatures.” Created in the image of God, we are made to imagine and create, form and separate, but all within inclusive community, always guided in the Truth that we inextricably interconnected with all of Creation.

The faithful response to this global pandemic has been to social distance. To make ourselves physically separate. And that has been so hard, but it has also invited us to practice this eternal truth. We are interconnected. We are one. We rely on one another. We are called to make sacrifices to keep one another safe and healthy and whole.

For many of us, who enjoy a fair amount of privilege, we often find ourselves talking about when life was “normal,” which basically meant that we could get through most days without even being mildly inconvenienced by the needs of a stranger. We could move through seasons and years without considering how our choices were affecting those with whom we weren’t intimately connected to through family or friendships. We could feel sad about something horrible happening to another community, and we could give some money, and feel better.

We could move through most of our days forgetting that as Paul says, “If one part of the body suffers, we all suffer.” We could forget that we interconnected and that our choices, our actions and inactions, our lives affect all.

Because the American, western ideals of individuality and self-reliance are built into nearly every single message we receive in our “normal” lives.

I feel the question we must ask today is how do we remember? How do we remember what is true about our God and about ourselves?

For me, it feels especially hard because though we are self-isolating, which feels good and right and important, we aren't getting the real, tangible reminders that come with actually being together and sharing holy space and holy time.

And I honestly do not have any real answers for you this day. I was genuinely hoping I could offer a few practical things to do; that I might gift y'all some insightful steps about how we can recharge our batteries and rediscover in body, mind, and soul, our connection with God and Creation and one another.

However, I don't have those answers, and I also don't think that's how it works. Made in the image of God, we are invited into the divine life that we might create inclusive community for all creatures. And one person is not equipped nor created to name answers. That's the point. We are formed, distinct but made from the same raw substance to live into the same eternal Truth, and we created to do it together.

So I don't have answers, but I do have an invitation. I invite to seek to remember. I invite you to investigate the walls and barriers which keep us from relying on and caring for one another, in this community and beyond. I invite you take stock of the barriers within your own beings, those barriers which tell you that you are not good or worthy, or that you are somehow deficient and having something to prove.

I invite you to take time to stop, to listen, and to remember the Truth about our God and about Creation and to seek to let that Truth guide and inform everything you do.

In the name of our Triune God, who Creates, Sustains, and Redeems us all. Amen.