

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

Partnership Sunday – Tri-Church Worship

Genesis 2.4b-7, 18; 2 Corinthians 8.1-4, 13-14; John 15.12-17

16 September 2018

Salem, Bridgeport

This Is GOOD!

Today I want to talk about relationships:

relationships between individuals and relationships between congregations.

So let's start with an easy Bible quiz.

In the first story of creation in Genesis chapter 1, after God created light, God saw that it was _____.

Then after God separated Earth and Seas, God saw that it was _____.

After God created vegetation, God saw that it was _____.

After God created sun, moon & stars, God saw that it was _____.

And after God created animals, God saw that it was _____.

Good!!!

Now let's skip to the creation story in Genesis chapter 2 that we read a few minutes ago.

Now I want everyone to pay attention here.

In this story God looks down on the man and says what? Not good!

(I'm not making this up! It's in the Bible!)

God looks at the man and says: Not good. Can't leave this man creature on his own, by himself.

I will create for him an "ezer" - that's the original Hebrew word –

and in addition to helper, it can also be translated, "tutor", "rescuer", or "savior"!

Don't worry – I'm not going there! Just sayin'...

The point is, no matter how you translate it: humans are created for relationship, for connection, for love.

From our very beginnings in our mother's womb, we are connected.

And then hopefully we are born into loving relationships with family and friends.

Anyone who has ever loved someone who has not loved them back,

knows the excruciating pain of a broken heart.

Anyone who has lost a loved one knows the overwhelming grief of loneliness.

Even many – if not most – in significant relationships may experience brokenness and lack of fulfillment.

But even outside of family and friends, relationships are important.

Last week I went to a lecture given by Laurie Santos, a professor at Yale.

When she became head of one of the residences where students live

she saw how extremely unhappy they all were, suffering from depression and anxiety and stress, and she realized she needed to do something about it,

so she put together a course called "psychology and the good life"

and it quickly became not only the most popular course at Yale, it went viral around the world.

The reason the course was so popular was that it changed people's lives

through some unexpectedly easy ways, one of which was "connection".

According to the research, connecting with people greatly and quickly improves one's quality of life.

That's obvious, right?

But here's the interesting thing:

it doesn't have to be with significant relationships like family or friends;

it can be talking with a stranger on a bus,

or having a brief conversation with the cashier at the bank,

or interacting with someone in the checkout line at the grocery store.

Just these small seemingly insignificant connections have a major impact on our lives.

So maybe, just maybe, they are no insignificant.

I believe that God calls us into relationships for mutual support and growth.

It should never be about trying to exert power over the other person, or change them, or make them wrong.

At their best relationships are about people who walk together as equals, who respect each other's opinions,

and who are curious and as open to learning as to teaching.

There is no one in your life by accident.

God has brought every person you know into your life for a reason,

and it is part of life's mystery and adventure to discover what those reasons are.

And just as God brings individuals into relationship, so God brings congregations into relationship.

Paul often talks about our relationships within the church — how each part of the body is needed — but usually he's referring to gifts within a particular congregation.

In the passage from 2 Corinthians we read today he's talking about relationships between congregations. Here he happens to be talking about sharing money, but I believe there's a greater truth in what Paul says, about congregations sharing their blessings so that abundance overflows and fills up needs.

I don't for one minute believe that it's an accident that our three congregations have been brought together.

We're so different demographically in terms of race and age and class and probably a dozen other things, and that in itself is really awesome because God loves the diversity which God has created, and we have that together in a way we don't have it separately.

And we're different in other ways, too.

Let me just check a minute:

whose congregation interprets the Bible correctly?

who has the correct theology?

who worships the right way?

Funny, huh, that we all think we're right?

But instead of trying to convince each other that we've got it right,

perhaps what would better please God is for us to not only be respectful of each other,

but curious about why we think and act the way we do and willing to learn from each other.

And at least as important as our conversations with each other are,

the fact is that we can serve God's people & impact God's world better together than we can do separately.

There's a whole lot of brokenness out there.

None of our congregations has the resources in people or in money to make much of an impact on our own, but together we could.

Jesus said to his disciples then and to us now,

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command you....

I appointed you to go and bear fruit...”

And “the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.”

Jesus has called us into relationship, commanded us to love one another, and appointed us to bear fruit.

The challenge is great, but the promise is greater: God will give us all we need, and indeed, all we ask.

Today let's claim that promise.

Let's pray that as individuals we will have the will and the courage to love our friends enough to sacrifice all we are for them.

Let's pray that as congregations that we will open our minds and hearts to learn from each other those things God would have us learn.

Let's pray that as God's children, as God's servants, and as God's friends, we would be empowered to touch the lives of everyone we meet with God's grace, God's power and God's love.

As we grow in love for each other, as we learn from each other, and as we serve together,

I am confident that at the end of the day

God will look down on all God has accomplished in this place and say,

“This...THIS is GOOD! **Amen**”