

United Methodist Church

Elmore, Worcester

May 2, 2021

“Christ is the vine. We are the branches. Abide in the vine, abide in the love.”

Prelude, Gathering and Announcements

Moment of Silent Preparation

*Call to Worship (*One - All*)

One: Come to Christ, the true vine. Come to love one another.

All: We have come to abide in the vine. We have come to the household of love.

One: Come to set aside your fears, for perfect love drives out fear.

All: We come to love one another, as God has loved us.

One: Come! All are welcome here.

*Hymn of Praise

[Love Divine, All Loves Excelling](#) # 384 (UMH – *red*)

*Opening Prayer

Divine Vine-grower, the soil of your love nurtures the roots of our lives each and every day. As we consecrate ourselves into your loving care, plant us in the soil of your love, that we may abide in Christ - our true vine, and bear the fruit of your love and grace. Give us rain in seasons of doubt and nourish our growth, that your harvest of love may bless the world. In your bountiful name, we pray. Amen.

*[Gloria Patri](#) # 71 (UMH)

Choir: [As the Deer](#)

Readings:

Acts 8:26-40

1 John 4:7-12

Young Disciples Talk and Prayer

Hymn of Preparation

[Of the Father's Love Begotten](#) # 184 (UMH – *red*)

Reflection

*Hymn of Response

[All Who Hunger](#) # 2126 (TFWS – *black*)

Joys, Concerns, & Thanksgiving

Pastoral Prayer & Lord's Prayer

Communion p. 8 (UMH)

*Sending Hymn

[Go, Make of All Disciples](#) # 571 (UMH – *red*)

Benediction

Postlude

***Please stand as you are able.**

Reflection *(May 2, 2021)*

Greening for Faith *(Colossians 1:15-17)*

By Rebecca Simon-Peter

Going green is all the rage. But what does it really mean? For persons and communities of faith, it's more than just changing light bulbs, although that's important. Going green at its core is about recognizing our [right relationship](#) with both our Creator and the creation.

It revolves around the question: What's the purpose of creation? Or even more importantly: Who or what is at the center of creation?

If you answered "me," you're not alone. We tend to have a pretty ego-centric or anthropocentric view of things. Even in the church. (Jesus died for "me.")

As if we humans are at the center of the universe and the rest of the creation exists simply for our sake.

The Bible doesn't hold that same view.

According to Genesis 1-2, we humans are not the center of creation; we are the stewards of creation. That's an important distinction. We're told to multiply and fill the face of the earth. But so are the fish of the sea and the birds of the air.

The difference between them and us is that we're to have dominion over them. Dominion does not mean dominate, defeat, or deny. It certainly doesn't mean to make extinct.

Instead, to get at the meaning of dominion, think domain. God's ruling authority over the domain of creation has been extended to us. We are authorized to rule in such a way that the "goodness" of creation is nurtured and cultivated. Not extinguished.

You might call this view of creation biocentric. It's the creation that is the center of God's focus—of which we are a part. An important part. But not the whole enchilada.

Everything has a right to exist simply because God created it. (That brings to mind the question of mosquitoes. But where would bats be without them?)

In other ways, the Bible's view of creation is decidedly Christocentric. Consider this passage from Colossians 1: 15-17: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” That’s a high view of both Christ and creation.

In the final analysis, though, the Bible is breathtakingly and unapologetically theocentric: “Let everything that breathes praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!” Psalm 150:6 Even sea monsters and stormy wind fulfill God’s command. (Psalm 148) God is both the center and circumference of all that is. All our living, loving, and worship are ultimately to be directed toward God.

So what’s our right relationship with Creator and creation? To praise God with our being and our actions. And to be a good steward of creation, so that by its very being, the creation can also praise God.

We would do well to recover these biblical perspectives on creation.

Humanity has become a force of nature—through our massive population growth, our extensive technologies, and our unsustainable ways of living. We are overriding the delicate balances of the natural world. The consequences are disastrous.

By burning fossil fuels—coal for electricity, oil, and gas for fuel and transportation—we have pumped enough carbon dioxide into the air to raise the earth’s temperature and change the earth’s climates. Dramatically. Something no other [human civilization](#) has ever done.

As a result, air temperatures are rising. Oceans are warming. Ten thousand-year-old glaciers are melting. Permafrost is thawing. Antarctic ice sheets are breaking up. Ocean levels are inching up. Extreme weather events are the new normal as forests are burning up. The earth is crying out to us.

We who have been charged with being stewards of creation have somehow become sinners against that creation. The National Council of Churches reported in a 2005 letter to Church and Society that the earth is crying out to us.

What can we do in the name of going green? Change light bulbs. Move away from a “consumeristic-throwaway approach” to life. Drive more fuel-efficient vehicles. Eat lower on the food chain. Support women in developing countries to gain control over their own lives so that birth rates go down. Reduce individual and congregational CO2 footprints.

But chances are these actions will be no more than knee-jerk reactions if our understandings are not grounded in Scripture and theology.

Going green doesn’t start with the energy bill. It starts in the reading of Scripture. It builds through recognition and repentance. It’s underscored in the pulpit and the prayers of the

people. It takes root in a growing awareness of our right relationship to Creator and Creation. It culminates in changed lives—and changed light bulbs.

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(*Rebekah* is passionate about reconnecting spiritual leaders with their God-given powers to co-create miracles with the divine. Her award-winning group coaching program, **Creating a Culture of Renewal**® has energized church leaders across the country to reclaim their calling and to grow their ministries. Known for teaching leaders how to bring out the best in the people who frustrate them the most, her work transforms church leaders and the congregations they serve.)

*We are using “Face Book Live” in Elmore worship, in an effort to keep in touch with folks who are at home during this time of increased Covid-19 activity. The printed reflection here is different from what is being preached today from the pulpit. Just so that you are aware, we are working in the weeds of what is permitted on the web and on line. We do not want to violate any copyright laws or be accused of plagiarism. We want to give credit where credit is due and acknowledge appropriately. Thank you for your patience and understanding during this time of pandemic unrest. May the peace of Christ reign in your heart and surround your family with love, compassion, grace and good health. **Pastor David***

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Pastoral Prayer

Thank you - Holy Spirit, we offer our prayers to you (...)

Outreaching, barrier-breaking, expansive Holy Spirit of the living, resurrected God, Shake us up! Move us out from the cozy confines of this congregation so that we might enjoy being part of your gospel. Nothing holds you back, evangelistic Spirit. No person or people - anywhere on the globe, are held back from your loving embrace. Yet there are timid and reserved people who do not think that the message of Jesus Christ is a message addressed to them. Bring your awareness to our limited minds - folks like that. Then, help us, O loving Lord, to become engaged with you in your mission to the very ends of the earth so that your kingdom comes and your will is done in heaven and on earth. May the manner of your grace be known such that the world may know this good news: God says to all, Come on in. Amen.

we pray this in your Holy name, as together, we say, ***Our Father, who art in heaven... Amen***

Quotes

The doubt with which we need to temper certainty is a searching doubt. It consists of a perpetual attitude of self-scrutiny, of not being content with the way we are, of poking around behind appearances, of interrogating ourselves...., Maintaining it indicates that we sense eternity's call. To be sure, this doubt can cripple. It can cause us to turn inward too much and make us think that we will never know what our status with God is. It can undermine the delight and adventure that being open to grace brings. It can produce hopelessness both about human nature and about our own ability to elude ambivalence and illusion. In spite of these risks, doubt is necessary, for without it we are not likely to move toward singleness of heart. Though it may seem paradoxical, a childlike faith requires the very thing which, if indulged in, would undermine it. (*Singleness of Heart*, Clifford Williams; p. 139.)

Being prayed for is also an element in the life of prayer – a very large part, but often largely underappreciated? When it is Jesus who is praying for us, being prayed for may well be the largest part of prayer. We remember where we are: we are in the John Seventeen Prayer Meeting. Jesus is praying.... We are actively listening. We want to be in on what Jesus wills to say. Jesus, the Word made flesh, is speaking to the Father. He is including us in his prayer. (*Tell It Slant*, Peterson; pp. 217-218.)

While pursuing the business of the day, we cannot ignore the Spirit-inspiring nudges we feel to examine its ups and down in a prayerful way: "Did I handle this difficult situation as Christ might have done? In what way did my decisions affect others? Did I act out of love for God and them or only for my own gratification?" Allowing God to be as much a part of our ruminations as an intimate friend draws us to deeper union. At the start of the day we ask God for guidance. At the end of the day we replay the tape to see if we have or have not responded wisely. When distractions tap like raindrops against the windowpanes of our mind, we renew our attention and turn toward the Holy. In due time we may experience a deeper calm, a miracle of grace, words fail to convey. (*Late Have I Loved Thee*, Susan Muto; p. 119.)

Lesson from Acts

It's very interesting that Philip, who did not have what we call the New Testament because it didn't exist, used what we call the Old Testament, or First Testament, or Hebrew Bible, to tell the Ethiopian about Jesus.

Some people, including a few preachers, don't have much use for the Old Testament. They don't like the Old Testament version of God. They don't like all the rules and commandments. They don't like the warring and the blood. They don't like the eye-for-an-eye culture of vengeance.

In taking this view, they are, of course, denigrating the Scriptures of one of the three major monotheistic religions of the world, Judaism. That aside, today's Acts lesson teaches us that the nature and work of Jesus Christ can be found not only in the four gospels, but in the Old Testament as well.

With Whom to Discuss?

So, why would the angel of the Lord direct Philip to just the right road, at just the right time, to intercept this foreign traveler as he begins his journey home? In all likelihood, it's because here is a man whose heart is uniquely receptive to the gospel message.

How do we know that? *Because of who he is.*

We know nothing of the reason for this man's long journey to Jerusalem — whether it was an affair of state or a personal religious pilgrimage. But we do know he would not have received a warm welcome at the temple. He was very likely returning home in great disappointment.

Now, maybe that had something to do with his race, but far more likely it was because he was a eunuch. The law of Moses specifically prohibits a person of his physical condition from entering the temple (Deuteronomy 23:1). The scribes and pharisees would have shunned him on the streets. The learned rabbis, with whom he longed to discourse, would have spared him little time.

He had the personal wealth to buy a scroll — a handwritten manuscript of the book of Isaiah — a souvenir of great price. But alas, he had no one to discuss it with.

Credit to God

On the face of it, when one considers the rather remarkable resourcefulness of Christ in reaching out and embracing all, one wonders why we should not do better in sharing our faith with all. Yet then one recalls the remarkable ingenuity of contemporary godlessness along with the invention of modern atheism that made the modern world possible, and failures in evangelization are more understandable. First, we marginalize and banish all mention of God (with help from Freud and Mach), and then we are free to build the modern, democratic, officially atheistic state with its Promethean sense of control and its propensity for unrestrained violence and its omnivorous market. When one considers the extraordinary resources given to the effort of shutting us up, curling us all up within ourselves, it is quite a credit to God that I am enabled to hear anything other than the sound of my own voice

God Is a Missionary God

One aspect of our pastoral care is the formation of people who delight in, wait upon, and relish the ubiquitous, evangelistic activity of a God named Trinity. Pastors must enjoy cleaning up after the intrusions of this God. We do not work alone as pastors. Pastoral fatigue is more often than not the result of a theological failure of nerve to enjoy the intrusions of this God rather than the result of pastoral overwork. In fact, much pastoral overwork is due to disbelief in the relentlessness of Jesus. Atheism leads to the assumption that it is up to us to save the world or it will not be saved.

A fundamental insight (derived from Karl Barth) was David Bosch's contention that "mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God.... Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world: the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission.... There is a church because there is mission, not vice versa." Church is what we pastors manage after God embraces the world.

Come on in.

Pastoral Message: (Acts 8:26-40)

BENEDICTION:

(Romans 16:25-27) ***Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith – to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.***

Offertory: *Throughout this Covid-19 pandemic, we wish to acknowledge your financial support. Thank you for your continued contributions. Your gifts – tithes and offerings, allow the Elmore and Worcester United Methodist Churches to continue ministries to and with our neighbors. We appreciate your continued support and prayers. Send contributions to:*

Elmore UMC, c/o Sarah Frazee, 242 Hardwood Flats Rd, Wolcott, Vt. 05680;

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Thank you. *Your Finance Team*

The song *Be Present At Our Table, Lord* is one of several that can be sung as an English or Norwegian table prayer at meals. As an predominately Lutheran country since 1537, to say this song has a long tradition in Norway is no exaggeration!
The music is attributed to the Genevan Psalter (a song book) in 1551 and the original lyrics were written by British hymnist John Cennick in 1741.

Be Present at Our Table Lord

Be present at our table, Lord;
Be here and everywhere adored;
Thy creatures bless, and grant that we
May feast in paradise with Thee.

We thank Thee, Lord, for this our food,
For life and health and every good;
By Thine own hand may we be fed;
Give us each day our daily bread.

We thank Thee, Lord, for this our food,
But more because of Jesus' blood;
Let manna to our souls be giv'n,
The Bread of Life sent down from Heav'n.

Ms. Gorman [said](#) in another tweet: "In a sense, he was right. I AM A THREAT: a threat to injustice, to inequality, to ignorance. Anyone who speaks the truth and walks with hope is an obvious and fatal danger to the powers that be." (Amanda Gorman)

****Home-bound Communion** *(May 2, 2021)*

Invitation: Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him and seek to grow into his likeness. Let us draw near with faith, make our humble confession, and prepare to receive this Holy Sacrament.

Confession and Pardon: We do not presume to come to this your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own goodness, but in your unfailing mercies. We are not worthy that you should receive us, but give your word and we shall be healed, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hear the good news: Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; that is proof of God's love toward us. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

Sign of peace!

The Great Thanksgiving

Consecrating the elements: Lift up your hearts and give thanks to the Lord our God.

Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, you made us in your image, to love and be loved. When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast. By the suffering, death, and resurrection of your only Son Jesus Christ you delivered us from slavery to sin and death and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

On the night in which Jesus gave himself up for us he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out

for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink of it, in remembrance of me.”

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ’s offering for us. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us, on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet. Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and forever. Amen.

Lord’s Prayer

Breaking the Bread and Giving the Bread and Cup:

The body and blood of Christ, given for you. Amen.

Prayer

Most bountiful God, we give you thanks for the world you have created, for the gift of life, and for giving yourself to us in Jesus Christ, whose holy life, suffering and death, and glorious resurrection have delivered us from slavery to sin and death. We thank you that in the power of your Holy Spirit you have fed us in this Sacrament united us with Christ, and given us a foretaste of your heavenly banquet. We are your children, and yours is the glory, now and for ever; Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessing

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all! **Amen.**