

All Things Are Connected

Psalm 65: 5-13

John 13:31-35

April 24, 2022-celebrating Earth Day

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Psalm 65: 5-13

By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas. By your strength you established the mountains; you are girded with might. You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples. Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy. You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it. You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness. The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.

John 13:31-35

When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him,* God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

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Connected.

That is the first word I hear every morning as my wake-up routine is to listen to the Lectio 365 devotional app, so as I put my ear buds in, I hear, 'connected, connected.' While I know that is Bluetooth technology telling me that my ear buds are synced to my cell phone so that I can listen to the app, I hear the word 'connected,' in a much different way. I hear it in the mindset of preparing to listen to the morning Scripture, prayer and message, to start my day with a great spiritual grounding, to feel connected to God, God's people and God's creation, to feel connected to what this day will be and bring. I listen to Lectio to feel connected as I begin a new day, and the simple Bluetooth assurance fits just right.

Feeling closely connected to God, staying connected with the One who gave us life, we experience the many fruits that God offers us: peace, joy, hope, encouragement, grace and kindness, and then share those spiritual fruits with others in our actions, our thoughts and our prayers. We develop right, healthy priorities, goals and paths. The image of God within is radiated out into our world, our relationships with others.

Abraham Maslow's famous pyramid of the human Hierarchy of Needs reminds us that besides food, water, and safety, love and belonging are the most important needs we must fulfill. We are social beings who need interpersonal relationships, who desire intimacy, who seek to connect with others, and to be welcomed into a group. When these needs are met, our overall

well-being improves, and we live a more fulfilled life. When we feel connected we have lower levels of anxiety and depression and have higher self-esteem, greater empathy for others, and can be more trusting and cooperative. Humanity thrives by being connected with others. That is how we have moved from gathering and hunting for our food to shopping for it in grocery stores. That is how we have moved from caves to cities, from horses to horsepower, from stone tablets to electronic tablets.

Our healthy connections though are not limited to personal relationships as we are connected throughout the whole web of life. What touches one truly touches all. The image of God within is radiated out into our world, our relationships with others. We are reminded of our very purpose in God's creation:

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth*.'

Dominion is to have care and concern, to tend to with attention and respect. Dominion is not to be domination, which is control and power over, force and exploitation. God entrusted us with the loving care for creation.

In his 65th psalm, David celebrated a world fully alive with the bounty, joy and glory of God as it calls us to be mindful and grateful for God's creation as we have been created to be caregivers and stewards of all that was created by God's strength and might: the mountains, the seas and the waves, all that is water and watered, the grains and the bounty, the pastures of the wilderness and the meadows for the flocks. It is a song of praise for our incredible world, a world that truly provides us with everything we need. God created all the world in harmony and balance, in plenty and abundance. The right amount of dark and light, correct oxygen levels for all living beings, a water cycle that moves water from sky to soil to rivers and then back to the sky, flowers and plants and animals all in balance of diversity, purpose and relationship. We have all the reasoning and skills to honor, protect and preserve this remarkable world, yet, we are not doing so, we are not fulfilling our role in God's eternal purpose for humanity. We are not staying connected to one another, or to God's call upon us. We have let go of our right, healthy priorities, goals and paths. The image of God within us is not being radiated out into our world, our relationships with others.

Global climate change has already had noticeable effects on our environment. Temperatures are rising so that glaciers are shrinking, ice on our rivers and lakes is thawing earlier, plant and animal ranges have changed, trees are flowering sooner, and there are longer, more intense heat waves. Greenhouse gas emissions, intensive farming, endangered species and animal extinction, deforestation and urban sprawl, air, water, soil and noise pollution, and sick building syndrome are all clear, sad signs that we have lost our way in following God's purpose for us, that we have forgotten, or become careless and disconnected in our responsibility to, as Chief Noah Sealath so poignantly said, "This we know. The earth does not belong to us; we belong to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth. We did not weave the web of life; we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves."

On this weekend that we celebrate Earth Day, and just a week after we joyously celebrated Jesus' resurrection for the redemption of all creation, we hear his words, 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love

one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.’ As his own life made clear, such love is not expressed in merely words but in deeds, even costly ones, for the sake of all that is living. Our call to love one another goes beyond loving humanity, and out into all of creation.

UCC Pastor Bill Utke** says that understanding Jesus’ call to love one another needs to be expanded. “Often our faith has been limited, selective, and centered in one living species, humans. But Earth day reminds us of all the “little ears” that are listening to us and watching us and in their own way giving thanks to God. The trees and grass outside, the bees buzzing around the sanctuary, the plants in the gathering space, the deer and raccoons wandering by our open windows in the parking lot. God’s revelation and salvation is not just for humans, not just for “Church people.” God loves sharks, and whales, hawks and wild turkey, house pets, and leaves, flowers and streams, as well as humankind.

These are powerful words Jesus leaves us with. He could have said “Come and die with me,” or “keep the faith after I’m gone,” or “go and preach and teach in all the world.” Instead he leaves us with a most simple yet challenging Word, “love one another.” It’s another way of saying the whole world will know us not by our sermons or sacraments or festivals, or buildings, or our religious symbols... but by the love we share and the love we receive. That is how foundational it is.”

God created humanity in God’s image to care for creation. Jesus commands us to love one another. The image of God within us is radiated out into our world, our relationships with others, with God’s creation as we thrive by being connected with others and knowing, honoring, and loving that all things are connected. Amen.

*Genesis 1: 26a, 28

** *Love That Gives Life*, <http://emanuel-ucc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/April-24-2016.pdf>