

## "DO WE NOTICE AND COLLABORATE IN THE VERY GOOD?"

A sermon by Pastor Clare Gromoll

Focus texts: Genesis 1:1-2:3, Psalm 8

Friends (long-time and newer), let us wonder together on this first Sunday after Pentecost – a day when we celebrate graduates and when we decide whether or not to merge with another congregation to become one body: Do we notice and collaborate in the very good? This morning, we heard these words toward the end of the creation story: “God looked at all of this creation, and proclaimed that this was good – very good.” I invite us to be open to today’s question as it relates to both our individual lives and the life of our congregation – do we notice and collaborated in the very good? Let us pray:

Life-giving, life-sustaining God, you are the love that permeates our days with beauty and goodness. Be with us this morning as we each reflect on our experiences with the goodness of your creation. In every move we make, grant us serenity to accept the things that are not within our power to change, courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

Friends along this human journey, our question for this morning is two-fold. How do you approach the sacred work of noticing? How do you approach the sacred work of collaboration? And how do we approach this work together? Let’s draw upon the wisdom we can find in the creation story from Genesis, the Psalmist’s articulation of awe and wonder, and Braiding Sweetgrass (whose subtitle is Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants).

Let’s start at the beginning – that is, the story of the beginning as passed down to us by our ancestors in faith. In the passage from Genesis, I noticed something with fresh eyes, ears and heart this past week. I observed a deep rhythm within the story. Six times we heard, “Evening came, and morning followed.” Each night giving way to a new day and each day giving way to a new night – this deep, old, strong rhythm that has enormous impact on how we live as humans and impacts the lives of many if not all sentient beings. The rhythm of evening and morning is so powerfully fundamental to the flourishing of life that we likely all notice it. Yet do we collaborate with the rhythm of evening coming and morning following? I think that appreciation is what links noticing (that is, observing) with collaboration or co-creation.

Toward the end of this creation story (which is one of several differing creation stories in our Judeo-Christian scriptures), we hear the faithful storyteller’s sense of how God (that is, creative Love) collaborates with the rhythm of evening and morning. We heard,

“Thus the heavens and [E]arth and all their array were completed. On the seventh day God had finished all the work of creation, and so, on that seventh day, God rested. God blessed the seventh day and called it sacred, because on it God rested from all the work of creation.”

To call something sacred means to recognize and name it as holy – as something that inspires awe and invites gratitude and wonder. I wonder: do you recognize completion? Do you pause to acknowledge when your work – your contribution to something – is finished? By marking an ending, we create space to rest. I acknowledge that – in my own life – it is most often in moments of rest, relaxation and play that I feel most aware of the sacred. When at rest, my soul opens more fully to being inspired – to accepting God’s invitation to awe, gratitude and wonder.

So I wonder: where and with whom do you rest, relax and play in ways that open your soul further to awe, gratitude and wonder?

And I wonder: how might we weave more rest, relaxation and wonder into our common life as a congregation – such that we exude and model ways of awe, gratitude and wonder?

I invite you to imagine how much our congregation could grow in our capacity to balance the work of co-creation with replenishing experiences of rest and play if we merge our communal energy, financial resources, work ethic, and heart with those of our friends at St. Peter’s United Church of Christ!

To be inspired means to be breathed into. As people of faith, we trust God’s Spirit to breath into us. How might you co-create more moments when inspiration can happen for you and others?

Let’s turn to the voice of another ancestor in faith – the Psalmist, who in Psalm 8 seems to be nearly bursting with fresh inspiration toward awe, gratitude and wonder. We heard the Psalmist sing,

“You have made us in your image, you fill us with your Love;  
You have made us co-creators of the Earth!  
Guardians of the planet!  
to care for all your creatures,  
to tend the land, the sea, and the air we breathe;”

We human beings are called to be co-creators, guardians, givers of care, tenders among all of Love’s beings – rock, wind, stream, plant and animal. I wonder: in the times and spaces you inhabit; do you notice and act upon your responsibility to collaborate, co-create, guard, give care, tend within the very good web of life?

I highly recommend the book we are reading as our June selection for People's Book Club in conjunction with our congregation's spring quarterly mission focused on land recognition and stewardship. In *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, indigenous botanist, mother, teacher and author Robin Wall Kimmerer explores themes of mutual flourishing; mindful appreciative presence, and transformation.

I would like to share a few brief excerpts with you from this author's capacities to notice and collaborate.

Kimmerer shares this learning about mutual flourishing and reciprocity from the wisdom of fungi: "They weave a web of reciprocity, of giving and taking. In this way, the trees all act as one because the fungi have connected them. Through unity, survival. All flourishing is mutual. Soil, fungus, tree, squirrel, boy—all are the beneficiaries of reciprocity." I wonder: with whom are you mutually flourishing?

Kimmerer shares this learning about noticing the gifts all around us: "Strawberries first shaped my view of a world full of gifts simply scattered at your feet. A gift comes to you through no action of your own, having moved toward you without your beckoning... your only role is to be open-eyed and present." She goes on to share wisdom from essayist Lewis Hyde, who has studied gift economies. Hyde teaches that those resources or beings who are treated as gifts remain plentiful. I wonder: do you notice gifts in ways that support them in being plentiful?

Kimmerer shares this learning about how ceremonies support us in awakening. She writes, "Ceremonies large and small have the power to focus attention to a way of living awake in the world." I wonder: what ceremonies or rituals in our life as a worshipping, learning, relational community support you in living in a more awake way?

Finally, Kimmerer narrates an experience of harvesting maple sap to create maple syrup through many laborious efforts with her young daughters. In that context, she refers to the origin story of the Anishinaabe people, which includes an ancestor named Nanabozho; who taught the people about drawing sweetness from maple trees. Kimmerer writes of Nanabozho:

"His teachings remind that one half of the truth is that the earth endows us with great gifts, the other half is that the gift is not enough. The responsibility does not lie with the maples alone. The other half belongs to us; we participate in its transformation, It is our work, and our gratitude, that distills the sweetness." I

wonder, friends: will we participate in the transformation of gifts present in our congregation and among our neighbors?

Kimmerer used these beautiful words to describe the time when she and her daughters found their home. She wrote, "This is where we would fall to earth." Mutual appreciative noticing and collaboration will be our way forward – our way of continuing to "fall to earth." May we notice the very good gifts and collaborate in our mutual flourishing, because Love is counting on us. Amen.