

How Will We Pursue Companionship?

People of God – people sourced by immeasurable Love, I invite us to wonder together this morning: How will we pursue companionship? The love of God has drawn us together on this early autumn morning – via livestream and here in our house of worship – on land which the Wahpekute Dakota people and others have loved for millennia before us.

As we move into this time of wondering, let's pause to pray. Holy Spirit, we long for your loving energy to affirm and challenge us today. We give thanks for the opportunity to pause, surrounded by your beauty and goodness in this space and in the company of these people. Help us tap into the deep wisdom of childlike awe, reminding us of our belovedness and capacity for companionship. Guide the meditations of our hearts and minds, we pray. Amen.

Friends, let's explore the value of companionship. I drew today's question from the opening words of our reading from Genesis: *"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.'"* As you get to know me, you'll find that I am drawn to and compelled by the concept of partnership. Mutually respectful collaborations (partnerships) are what motivate me in the ministry we pursue as a church – within and beyond our walls.

I am also drawn to the egalitarian translation of these ancient Hebrew words in *The Inclusive Bible*, where this verse reads as such: *"Then God said, 'it is not good for the earth creature to be alone. I will make a fitting companion for it.'* The Latin roots of the word companion are *com-* (meaning with) and *panis* (meaning bread), or 'one who eats bread with another.' Our English word companion was likely also influenced by the French *compagnon* (or 'one who breaks bread with another').

Today's portion of one of several biblical creation stories is a wonderful match for World Communion Sunday, when we recognize that we are breaking bread with followers of Jesus all over the world as one beautifully diverse body of Christ today. In a moment, I will return to the narrative about the creation of humankind. I will lift up a quality of each (Adam and Eve) that I have noticed for a first time might be what drew them toward one another as companions.

Before focusing in on them, I invite us to consider the people with us here today. You may have built experiences with some of these fellow members and friends of our congregation to an extent that you have already found companionship with some of us – persons with whom you already feel a deep sense of belonging and an ability to break bread and share in the work of community. I invite you now to take look around, appreciating everyone who is here until you land on one person with whom you either already feel depth of companionship or by whom you have been intrigued and would like to further develop a friendship. Please quietly identify that person now. I will give you a moment to look around. Now that you have identified at least one person with whom you want to either maintain or further grow a sense of companionship, I invite you to close our eyes for a moment to wonder: **What is one specific quality you have noticed in that person – a quality that you appreciate as vital to strong companionships in our congregation?** Bring to your mind one quality of a person here whom you already know well or would like to know better.

Opening our eyes to one another, let's hear (not names but) some of those qualities present in this community that you feel are strong building blocks for companionship. [*kindness, caring, very big heart, good listener, loyalty*]

I encourage you to approach later this morning a person you may have thought of. I can tell you from personal experience how specific words of appreciation have the power to encourage. Appreciate those quirks and those forms of goodness!

Our ancestors in faith wrote the creation myths as a way of articulating their experiences and ideas about a powerfully loving God's abiding presence in their lives. Let's notice the qualities the storytellers depicted in Adam and Eve as strong substance for companionship.

We heard, *"So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air and brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle and to the birds of the air and to every animal of the field, but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner."* Adam was organized – to the -nth degree! Do you have a companion in your life on whose steady, organized rhythms you can rely? Thank that one!

And then came Eve. We heard, *"Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh."* Ok, we have typically heard this passage interpreted as all about marriage. That is fine and good for some. But to what in Eve did Adam feel drawn to cling? We won't learn until a few pages later in the story when Eve follows the muse of her curiosity and confidence, choosing to try the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. I think singer songwriter Flamy Grant honors Eve so precisely with these lyrics (which are actually a bit saltier this this): *"Eve said, 'Buck the system. I am chasing after wisdom."* I commend to you the song "Esther, Ruth and Rahab." Friends, don't we need the organized, steady Adams and the brave Eve's among our companions?

And knowing we are each our own deepest companion, can we affirm ways of both steady organization and bravery within ourselves?

Let's shift to the Psalm and gospel readings for a few moments. When were you last filled with awe like the Psalmist from whom we hear today? When did you last let your indignation flow out of you as truth-telling like we experience from Jesus in the gospel reading for today? And when did you last modify your own ways of behaving after witnessing one of the youngest or eldest among us approach life without pretense?

Let's explore together for a brief moment the possibilities of holding more space for being **filled with awe based in creative love**, for **boldly speaking difficult truths when shaken**, and for **practicing more authenticity than pretense** in our behavior. Let's specifically wonder about the wisdom of the youngest and oldest people in our lives.

We hear these words from the Psalmist: *"When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are humans that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?"* The Psalmist continues: *"Yet you have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;"* (Psalm 8: 3-4, 6). We can appreciate the simple movement from appreciative awe to recognition of our responsibility in the web of creation.

Let's pause right now, closing our eyes again to call to mind something beautiful that you often see, hear, smell, or taste in your daily living. Then we'll name them as a way of inviting each other to heightened awareness. Let's be quiet for a moment bringing to mind something that looks, sounds, smells, or tastes beautiful. *[silence]*.

And as open our eyes to one another, can we name aloud some of the beauty we perceive with our senses. What causes you awe? [*Lake St. Croix, blue birds, the sky, flowers, dogs, the Linden Tree in our front yard of multi-colors, parent and child, lightning, children playing in the playgrounds, my cat*] Yes, all of this! What else do you see, hear, smell, taste that is beautiful?

“Yet you have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;” I wonder, **how might we each more proactively care for the wellbeing of what we find beautiful?** And I wonder, **what steps might we need to take to surround ourselves in space and company that remind us that we, too, are part of the beauty – “crowned with glory and honor,” embodiments of the love of God in connection with all else?**

Let’s turn to the gospel reading from Mark for a lesson in embodiment of belovedness. It is a brief passage, so let’s let it wash over us in its fullness again: *“People were bringing children to [Jesus] in order that he might touch them, and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the children come to me; do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.’ And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.”* (Mk 10:13-16).

What does it mean that it is to just such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. And how might we welcome the kingdom of God as a little child? It’s important to note that in the time and space when Jesus lived, children were to some extent considered property.

They weren't expected to live into adulthood necessarily, so they were treated as less-than until they potentially did make it into adulthood. Yet Jesus welcomed them and he saw and heard in them something that the rest of us needed to know.

Imagine being in a vehicle in recent days with a child in your backseat – perhaps your grandchild, a niece or nephew, or your own child – you're listening to the radio. Suddenly the child interjects, "Why is that man yelling at the women who's asking the questions? He sounds so mean! Doesn't he know we're supposed to be kind?!" Imagine you're in a grocery store in recent days, and as you leave that store with your grandchild, niece or nephew, or your child (or you overhear this interaction) they say, "Did you notice how the cashier was not looking at that black man who went before us? Did you notice that they didn't even talk to him? And then they were so nice to us! Don't they know that that's racism and that's not ok?" Friends, I think Jesus learned some of his capacity for bold indignation from the children who were around him – who could call a spade a spade, who could see the love and the hate, the good and the evil surrounding them (clear as day).

We can often learn so much about courage and truth from the youngest and eldest among us. You may have seen the bumper sticker that proclaims this: "Speak the truth, even if your voice shakes." You may not know the origin of this saying. Feminist Maggie Kuhn lived the length of the twentieth century. National Women's Hall of Fame offers this brief information about Kuhn: "In 1970, forced to retire from her career with the Presbyterian Church at age 65, Kuhn and a group of her friends in similar circumstances organized and founded an organization which became the Gray Panthers.

The organization was created to work on issues of concern to the elderly, such as pension rights and age discrimination, but also to concern itself with larger public issues, such as the Vietnam War and other social concerns.” Kuhn once stated, “Leave safety behind. Put your body on the line. Stand before the people you fear and speak your mind – even if your voice shakes. When you least expect it, someone may actually listen to what you have to say.” Words of wisdom from feminist Maggie Kuhn.

In what circumstances of your life might you draw inspiration from the youngest or eldest among us as you aim to speak straightforward truth, perhaps with voice shaking, because you perceive that it needs to be heard? I’ll add in that the person you might affirm later today (whom you’d like to know better) – it might make your spirit or voice shake to say something that true and affirming to someone. And that is powerful love.

The Psalmist wrote, *“From the lips of infants and children you bring forth words of power and praise, to answer your adversaries and to silence the hostile and vengeful” (Ps. 8:2).* And in *Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness*, Nan Merrill says it this way: *“Who with the innocence and spontaneity of a child, confound those who are mighty and proud, You comfort the unloving and fearful.”*

May we learn from the youngest and oldest among us how to take heart in the knowledge that we are beloved and powerful exactly as God created us. Let’s form companionships within that beauty – because Love is counting on us. Amen!

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Genesis 2:18-24, Psalm 8, Mark 10:13-16