

San Lorenzo Community Church, United Church of Christ

Sermon: Ties that Bind

Preached by Rev. Annette J. Cook

Sunday, September 10, 2017

A reading from Psalm 139

You have looked deep into my heart, LORD,
and you know all about me.

²You know when I am resting or when I am working,
and from heaven you discover my thoughts.

³You notice everything I do and everywhere I go.

⁴Before I even speak a word, you know what I will say,

⁵and with your powerful arm you protect me from every side.

⁶I can't understand all of this!

Such wonderful knowledge is far above me.

⁷Where could I go to escape from your Spirit or from your sight?

⁸If I were to climb up to the highest heavens, you would be there.

If I were to dig down to the world of the dead, you would also be there.

⁹Suppose I had wings like the dawning day and flew across the ocean.

¹⁰Even then your powerful arm would guide and protect me.

¹¹Or suppose I said, "I'll hide in the dark
until night comes to cover me over."

¹²But you see in the dark because daylight and dark
are all the same to you.

¹³You are the one who put me together inside my mother's body,

¹⁴and I praise you because of the wonderful way you created me.

Everything you do is marvelous! Of this I have no doubt.

¹⁵Nothing about me is hidden from you!

I was secretly woven together deep in the earth below,

¹⁶but with your own eyes you saw my body being formed.

Even before I was born,

you had written in your book everything I would do.

¹⁷Your thoughts are far beyond my understanding,
much more than I could ever imagine.

¹⁸I try to count your thoughts,

but they outnumber the grains of sand on the beach.

And when I awake, I will find you nearby.

This ends the reading from the Psalms. Thanks be to God.

San Lorenzo Community Church, United Church of Christ

Sermon: Ties that Bind

Preached by Rev. Annette J. Cook

Sunday, September 10, 2017

Where I grew up in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, the second Sunday of September was always called "Homecoming Sunday." This was the day people would return from the four corners of the earth to their childhood church home; and, because we were a college town, all sorts of new people would show up for the start of a new school year.

There would be a potluck dinner in the Fellowship Hall after church. An elder would pat my head and tell me. "Lord, you have grown up." You could hear the comments and conversation among everyone getting reacquainted, "You're what now? a doctor, a lawyer, a nurse, a physical therapist?" "You look just like your daddy did when he was your age." "Did you hear about Mrs. So and so who did this big thing. And did you hear that old Mr. Smith died of a broken heart. Oooo, let me tell you all about it."

Where I grew up, on Homecoming Sunday, the church was abuzz with reunion. And there would be SINGING!!!

Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love. / The fellowship of kindred minds is like that to that above.

When I was a kid, folks would go to church on Homecoming Sunday, and on every Sunday, and if you weren't there, we talked about you at the dinner table afterwards -- where you were? What happened? I hope everything is okay.

People went to church every Sunday where I'm from because it was the only time of the week, for the most part, when you thought about spiritual things, about God and Jesus. It's different now. Folks don't come every Sunday, even though I wish they would.

Some folks now come to church like it's a professional baseball game. "Y'all going to church tomorrow? You got tickets?" "No, no tickets, we'll watch the game at home on TV." "Y'all going to church tomorrow? No, I don't feel like it. My baby likes to sleep until 10 and I worked hard all week and haven't had a minute to myself. "

When I was a girl, it didn't matter pretty much if your head was in a cast, you got up and went to church. I don't know if that's good or bad, but that's how it was. The nice part about everybody going to church every Sunday was you knew where you were going to be on Sunday morning, and better, you knew who was going to be there, too.

You knew that old lady who sang all wobbly in the choir was going to be there every Sunday, and though you made fun of her, she was part of your solid spiritual universe, a part you could count on. That man who served in WWII, lost one arm, had bubble gum in his pocket to give away and a row of perfect attendance pins, which is what you got if you didn't miss one week of Sunday School in an academic year. He wore those pins instead of his medals.

It's different now, for better or worse. Maybe back then we thought that God was only at church on Sunday mornings so if we missed worship, we missed seeing God. Our 20- and 30-year-olds know that God is everywhere; and that's good news because some of us had to leave those home churches and we don't go home there anymore.

San Lorenzo Community Church, United Church of Christ

Sermon: Ties that Bind

Preached by Rev. Annette J. Cook

Sunday, September 10, 2017

Some of our home churches made it known that we aren't the kind of people who would be welcome to go back home. If we did go back, we knew we'd need to be very careful of our pronouns. Some of us would love to go back for the smells and bells, the sheer magnificent mystery of communion, but we can't, just can't.

Some of us feel like we can't go home because we have been educated away from our people – 'though it is the American dream that the next generation should get ahead, what with our graduate degrees and advanced skills, we lost the knack for the language of our families and communities of origin.

Some of us can't go home again because we lack the visa, the airline ticket. Or the place is gone, the place we came from has been obliterated by war and genocide. Some of us can't bear to go back home, where, because of drink or drugs, home was a hell, 'though we still love the ones we left there.

Some of us can't go home because we are old. Our parents and lifelong friends have gone ahead of us, we are the last standing. Some of us can't and won't go home because we are dying. Nothing will undo the disease. There is no way to stay alive long enough to see our children into their own long relationships, weddings and homes.

Here's the thing: This thing that we have here, this, what we are doing every Sunday is home. This isn't an academic event, not a sports competition. It's not American idol. What we do here makes home.

Every week someone shows up and turns on a sound system, and plans something for the children, and prepares an opportunity to sing, writes a sermon. Every week in the winter, someone turns on the furnace, and in the summer turns on the fans.

This praying together side by side, this making spiritual sense together, this is home. This marking the annual seasons of Lent and Easter, Advent and Christmas, life and death and life; this gathering for a shared meal whenever we have a picnic or a potluck or a reason to make a meal together; this Fellowship time and faith study and action committee – it's an effort to stay connected and have a tangible way to show God's love; this youth group strives to be creative in Spirit and fellowship; this preparing and serving a reception as we celebrate the life of each of our members who goes on ahead of us; this choir back in season; all of this is making home. We are doing homework.

Let me be even a bit more clear. What we are doing when we come together in this way, is finding a home in the heart of God. As individuals, we are finding that God has been home to us since before we were born. Hear the Psalmist, "You formed my inward being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. . . Your eyes beheld my unformed substance."

There in the heart of God, we are seen. "You know all about me.
²You know when I am resting or when I am working." We are claimed by God, shaped by God, "From behind and in front you shaped me. You set your palm upon me."

San Lorenzo Community Church, United Church of Christ

Sermon: Ties that Bind

Preached by Rev. Annette J. Cook

Sunday, September 10, 2017

We know God's presence at church, and we, like the Psalmist, know that *everywhere* we are, God is there. God is a mobile home, a trailer, a tent,

⁸ If I were to climb up to the highest heavens, you would be there.
If I were to dig down to the world of the dead,

you would also be there. ⁹ Suppose I had wings like the dawning day

and flew across the ocean.

¹⁰ Even then your powerful arm would guide and protect me.

God, who is our home, leaves the light on for us, "Even the darkness is not dark to you. The night dazzles as with the sun; the darkness is as light with You."

A place like San Lorenzo Community Church is a place trying to be this, a place where each of us bring as gift to each other, the little home made by God in each of us. We are learning the email address of that inner sanctuary so that we may easily return there to that homepage. We are learning to belong to that home and welcome other seekers into the sacred space of God's home.

How, how are we doing this? Some of us are able to do this simply by believing in the presence of God - some by actual mystical experience and knowing of God as home. The rest of us are doing it by practicing: By practicing joy, by practicing wonder, by praying, by singing, by hearing the word or saying the word, by baking bread together, trimming the bushes, visiting the sick, saying what is true, by asking questions that have no answers, by showing up and being present.

Because until justice comes, until the last breath, it doesn't really matter where we are or what happens to us if we are home in God.

This is why I am not overcome with worry or fraught with fear at the prospect of making a journey into an unknown period of Sabbatical rest. This is why my sadness at my leaving for a while is also filled with love and blessing that my time apart and your time here will be deep and rich and inspiring and creative.

Because we are making this house a home. We bring justice, make peace, comfort the people, and our hearts and this house is home because of God.

This is home. My heart is at home. And wherever I go, God is there. Wherever I go, I still share this house with you. Wherever I go, you still share this house with me. Because you are the also the house of God.

So from this day on, I am looking forward to another homecoming of hearts and minds, of purpose and cause, of feast and of love. Until then,

Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love. / The fellowship of kindred minds is like that to that above. Amen.