

6-6-21
Pentecost 2
Genesis 3:8-15
Communion

Losing Our Connection

One of the hardest parts of the last year and half for most of us has been losing our connection to the people, events, and institutions that give meaning and purpose to our lives. In March of 2020, most of us were in the midst of lives that were full of activity and relationships. We came to church. We went to meetings and social gatherings. We spent time with family and friends. We went out to eat. We went to Wal-Mart. Then sometime about the middle of that month, life changed for all of us. Suddenly we were all at home, wondering how long this would last and how it would end. We learned how to order lots of things online. Amazon and Wal-Mart pick up became our friends. But we missed our conversations with the checkers at Kroger or The Market. We missed bumping into people from church at the store and checking in with them. Those of us who have kids and other family out of town went a long time without seeing them. Some of us had both Christmas and staff meetings on Zoom. We've had two meetings of Presbytery on Zoom and are gearing up for another one. We found new ways to get us together for worship and to invite others to join us.

All of that taught us that we can adapt. We can find ways to do what needs to be done. But we also know that we have lost something along the way. We don't touch as much as we used to, and we may not. We're going to try to go back to a way of celebrating Communion this morning that was comfortable to us. But we'll also offer other options for people who aren't quite sure yet. And some will celebrate at home with what they have on hand. We'll see how it goes. The things that once bound us to

each other are still among us. It's just taking us a while to get back to them. Some of those connections are beginning to be reestablished, and some of them are being rethought.

There are all kinds of ways to think about the story we read this morning from Genesis. Sometimes we call it the story of the Fall, the story of how our relationship with God changed from what it was into what we made it. Sometimes we talk about this story as a way to explain where sin came from. We usually take the easy route and settle for "the Devil made us do it," instead of recognizing the pervasive nature of sin at the core of all of our lives. Some have tried to lay all the blame on Eve. Whether it was an apple or a pomegranate our ancestors ate is really not the issue. The core issue here is that what happened in that Garden changed things forever. And we are left to figure out what we can and what we will do about it.

Most of you know the story. God created the universe and then populated it with plants and animals and all that was necessary to sustain them. For some reason, that wasn't enough for God. I'm sure there are many plant and animal lovers among us. We derive great joy and satisfaction from those relationships. Sometimes we prefer the company of the garden or our pets over human contact. Those loves of ours can be much more satisfying than our relationships with one another sometimes—and a lot less demanding. But most of us find ourselves longing for some form of human companionship. And so did God. Looking out on all that he had made, God was unsatisfied. And so he made humans as the order of creation he would relate to in a distinctive way. This is not to say that God doesn't care for and sustain all the rest of creation, but the intention was that the relationship between God and humans would be on another whole level. And it was. Until it wasn't.

Remember some friend or romantic interest in your life. Before things got complicated with kids and jobs and bills and college savings plans and medical bills and all the other things that become part of our life. Remember how simple it used to be? When a walk in the park was as special as an expensive

dinner and tickets to some special event. Just being together was enough.

That's the way it started out between God and us. This image of God and our first parents walking and talking in the Garden is one of the most beautiful in all the Scripture. I'm not a big fan of the hymn "In the Garden," but there is something about "He walks with me and talks with me and tells me I am his own" that'll give you chills. The idea that we once lived in such connection to God that we could enjoy those simple walks and talks in the Garden and be sustained by them is something we still long for. To know that our first parents had that kind of a relationship gives us hope.

But you heard how the story goes. Just like all of our stories. Those simple walks in the park or trips just to get a Coke together soon weren't enough. The neighbors go on a cruise every year. And the neighbors on the other side moved to a bigger house in a better neighborhood. And we're not so sure we like the people who moved in there. There seemed to be so much more out there than we thought there was, and we decided we wanted some of all of it, and somehow when those wants took hold, what used to be enough just wasn't anymore. We lost our connection to what had drawn us together in the first place, and once we started down those other roads there was no turning back. The neighbors didn't make us want all that. That want came from somewhere deep within us where the core of who we are is.

Living within our means is a struggle for all of us. God had drawn some pretty broad boundaries around our lives. He said, "I'll meet you for this walk every evening. We'll talk about things that matter. The rest of the time you can have this whole Garden to roam around in. But stay away from that one tree."

You know, of course, that that one tree became the one we just had to sample. The Tempter may have convinced us that God didn't really mean what he said, but the want for what was on that tree came from within us. All of us.

Most of you have seen that pitiful little vehicle I drive. Some of you have been bold enough to ask when I plan to get rid of it. Of course I'd like to have something different. I won't even go through the list. It goes from the '66 Mustang I've told you about to all kinds of cars you probably can't imagine me in. I could have something different if I wanted it badly enough. But then I'd want another one and another one. So, until it leaves me on the side of the road (again). I'll just keep what I've got.

Don't think for a minute that I think that makes me immune to the thing we're talking about today. Not a chance. I'm as sinful as anyone else is. It's just that motors and leather seats and cupholders are not my primary temptation. What is is between God and me. So don't waste time trying to figure out what it is and I won't waste time meddling into yours. It's enough for us to be honest enough to admit that all of us have traded that fundamental, sustaining connection to God, that walk in the park every evening that used to be enough, for things that never will be.

Losing connection is a more helpful way for me to understand this story than trying to blame it on any of the parties involved in it.

I'm thinking of a couple of friends who used to be some of the most important people in my life. We worked together. We played together. We spent more time together than we spent with our families sometimes. We knew more about each other than we needed to know, but that's a part of what kept us connected. For many years, I couldn't even think about my life without their being in it. Especially in the summer when we used to work camps and conferences and events of one type or another. We really did spend more time together than we spent at home. We were connected in ways that we thought would last forever.

But you know what happens. Life happens. Situations change. For one thing, we all got too old to sleep in the woods and be responsible for kids that weren't ours. Some of those kids are in charge of those programs these days, and others have taken those roles over from us. But there were other things that

helped us lose our connection, too. Moves. Changes. Stories too painful to tell. But we lost our connection to one another. All of us still have full lives. Mine is here. Theirs are somewhere else. One of them has health issues. The other one has family demands. And we just don't have the connection to each other that we once thought we always would.

The Good News part of this sad story is that we all continue to care about each other and when the news began to get around about Blake's failing eyesight a couple of years ago, those two were among the first to be in touch. They can't do anything about it. I can't either. But they were both pretty big parts of his growing up and they care what happens to him. They still live far away, and they are not ophthalmologists. But when we talked—on the phone, not in the park or at camp---the things that connected us before are still there. And if I had a need that I thought they could meet, they'd still be the first people I'd call. And I suspect I'm on that same list for them. When we talked after that long spell away from one another, we connected again. What had bound us together was still there. It was just different. But somehow it still sustains us.

That's the same promise that underlies this painful story from Genesis. Adam and Eve messed up. And we've all paid the price for it ever since. There is something out there, usually far more complicated than a piece of fruit, that makes a walk in the park with God sound like not enough. And when we get it, we discover it's not enough either! Disobedience always comes with a cost. But God never said that he would cast Adam and Eve or any of us out forever. There was a price to be paid, but it was always in the mind and heart of God that that connection would be reestablished. And in Jesus Christ, it has been. And when we take that walk with God now, it's as if we were never apart.

I have another friend who was once right up there with those other two I told you about. We spent all those same times together, and we went through some other things together that were painful and difficult. There is no happy ending to that story yet. Haven't heard from him in years. Don't expect to for a while.

But someday I hope we'll reconnect. And when we do it will be as if we were never apart.

Some of us are somewhere along that spectrum with God. We're not ready for that walk in the park again just yet even though we remember how good it was. But we've got things to work though, things we're not ready to do yet. Just know that the promise of reconnecting is God's promise to us. Whatever caused us to lose our connection, there will come a day when it won't matter, when it will be as if we were never apart. And when that day comes, he will walk with us and talk with us and remind us that we have been his own all along. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of creation and of re-creation you set us in the midst of what you made and gave us everything we need for abundant life. But we wanted more. And we have lived with the consequences of our choices and will continue to. Help us to be more grateful, more satisfied with your provision. Help us to learn contentment. Make us better stewards of what you provide instead of people who can't or won't care for what we have. Teach us how to live in ways that honor your presence among us, and to be grateful. We know, O God, that we have also damaged the human relationships in which you have placed us. We emphasize our differences and our disagreements over our commonalities and our connections. Help us to do the work of peace. Help us to see our diversity as enrichment rather than threat. Help us to care for the least and the lost among us not as a burden but as a respond to your goodness to us.

We know, O God, how fragile our lives are. Some of us see it in our own bodies when illness and infirmity come to us. We know that you know our plight because, in Jesus, you have come and shared our life. So we ask for healing and recovery for those who are in pain. We ask for an end to pain and suffering in this life or in the life to come.

We remember in our prayers today all those we know to be in need of your care and ours. We have lifted the names of some, and we lift others before you now in our hearts. We give thanks for doctors, nurses, and other caregivers who work to restore health and wholeness. We pray for researchers who work toward new treatments, even cures for what ails us

We give thanks, O God, that even though these bodies of ours fail us, you renew our Spirits every day so that we never become without value or purpose to you.

Remember, O God, those we may have forgotten to pray for, those we may have given up on or forsaken. Remember all who have wandered from you and your Church. Restore us all, we pray until we take our place in your family again and live in hope of the great reunion we will one day know with you and with all the faithful. We pray all these things in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.