**Choosing Relationship**

Deuteronomy 30:15-20  
1 Corinthians 3:1-9

“One love, one heart, let’s get together and feel alright.” It’s not hard to imagine the Apostle Paul singing this Bob Marley refrain, which is the central story line in the book we just read, “One Love” by Marley’s daughter Cedella. Paul loved to sing. Luke tells us that after being severely beaten with rods and thrown into a cold damp prison, Paul and his companion Silas begin to sing. They, of course, had no hymnal so more than likely they were singing an easily repeatable refrain like “one love”. Paul takes it as a given that the congregations with whom he is in relationship are singing congregations. In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he writes be filled with the Spirit,19as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts. Music can move faith out of our heads and into our hearts, which is no doubt why Paul and people throughout the ages sing.

It is easy to imagine Paul singing “One love, one heart.” Unity is often on Paul’s mind. In our text today Paul says, “The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose…For we are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s fields, God’s building.” Paul strings together one metaphor after the other all intended to remind us of our one love, our one heart. Earlier in this very same letter Paul says to the Corinthians, “Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters,by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose”.

In Paul’s letter to the Colossians he writes, “I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ himself”. Unity, overcoming division, bringing us into right relationship is an overarching concern for Paul. Paul rejects the false divisions we often create. In his letter to the Galatians Paul writes, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”.

On this day, on this Sunday, when we join together with hundreds of other congregations concerned about global climate change we would be remiss if we also failed to note that when Paul speaks of the unity given to us by God, revealed in Christ, Paul includes all of creation. In Paul’s letter to the Romans he writes, “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” Paul would look at the beautiful paintings in our sanctuary and with St. Francis of Assisi, Paul affirms that our underlying unity, the bond of love holding us together includes the trees, the birds, the sun and the moon, all the wonders of creation. “One love, One heart.”

I do have a confession to make, when I watch the Olympics, I most often find myself rooting for the U.S.A. Part of me feels like I should be a better person, just wanting everyone to do their best. But, deep down, I hear that inner voice, “USA. USA”. If that South Korean, Russian, Sweede or Norwegian takes a fall, well that just gives our team a better chance. I know you are probably better than that, but I am being honest here. We instinctively align ourselves with those closest to us and often find it hard, indeed challenging to include in our circle of care those who are outside of those immediate relationships.

Paul, recognizes this human tendency we all share. The people of Corinth have developed relationships with those who have similar views about either the teaching of Appolos or the teaching of Paul. In and of itself, there is nothing wrong with these inner circles of friendships. The problem is that these relationships have begun hardening into a closed circle blinding them to the deeper unity which is theirs. This, of course, is the current great affliction for our national politics. The problem has much less to do with differing views, but rather the ways those differing views have hardened into circles of relationships that keep us from listening to and caring about those with whom we disagree.

Paul is about reclaiming that deeper unity, the one love, the one heart, that binds us all. Expanding the circle of our relationships, of course, means being truthful about ways in which those relationships have been denied in the past and are being ignored in the present. This past week I was honored to be part of a meeting of leaders from the Mendota Mdewakanton Dakota community and Executive staff from the Minnesota Historical Society. The Minnesota Historical Society is coming to the realization that it needs to be in relationship with the original people of Minnesota and being in relationship means telling a more truth filled story about the genocide, broken treaties, and land theft that is part of our past and substantially impacts the present.

Today we are growing in our awareness that living in relationship with creation, with the birds, the fish, the water, the air, all that exists, means among other things being truthful about the impact of global climate change. If we are in relationship with the whales, the polar bears, the butterflies, the moose of Northern Minnesota we can no longer say global climate change does not matter. If we are in relationship with the Indigenous Peoples of the Pacific Islands who worry about the rising seas, the drought stricken farmers of California, those in any part of the world suffering devastation of extreme weather we can no longer say global climate change does not matter. Paul is about expanding the circle of our relationships.

Sometimes that expansion of relationships comes with growing pains and tensions of its own. This past summer the United Church of Christ made a decision to begin divesting itself from fossil fuel companies. This past January two high school seniors from St. Luke’s Presbyterian church came before the Twin City Area Presbytery, calling upon the Presbytery to support fossil fuel divestment for the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. Speaking at the Presbytery, senior Cody Kirk said, “This is how I see the church really being like Jesus…Not just talking, but making hard choices to live like Jesus…caring for the poor and all in God’s creation without a voice; not taking more than our share; and preserving the earth for future generations.” Cody has captured the vision articulated by Paul, and put to song by Bob Marley, “One Love, One heart.” Yet, not everyone agrees with divestment of fossil fuel or stopping the Keystone Pipeline.

What does it mean to live in relationship? There will be prophetic growing pains as we stretch to expand that circle of who is included in the fullness of God’s love. But, as Moses reminds the Israelites and reminds us still, we have a choice to make. We can choose to walk in the ways of God, staying in relationship, staying in covenant, an ever expanding circle, the source of life or we can choose death and the curse that comes from denying, negating the fundamental unity that we are given. What will you choose? What will we choose? That is the question we continue to face.

Please join me again: “One love, one heart, let’s get together and feel alright.”

**Deuteronomy 30:15-20**

*In our first lesson the people of Israel are soon to enter the Promised Land. During their sojourn in the wilderness they have often been tempted to return to the life of slavery from which they escaped. Moses knows that if they are continue to be free than they need to remain in covenantal relationship with God and God’s ways, with each other and with all creation. For Moses living in relationship is a choice between life and death.*

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

**1 Corinthians 3:1-9**

*In this portion of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians Paul addresses an issue of internal division that has developed within the congregation. Some say they are being faithful to Paul and some claim faithfulness to Apollo. Paul insists that we have a much greater underlying unity that calls us together.*

And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.