**BB & All God’s Children**

Isaiah 6:1-8
Romans 8:12-17

Somehow you knew the crew helping Jill move the remaining items out of the Building Blocks Tutorial Class room would not be just any ordinary movers. As they entered Riverview Elementary school this past Thursday, each of them proudly wore name tags that read BB Mooovers. Over the years the beloved BB the cow has become the face of Building Blocks Tutorial. BB welcomed children into Building Blocks and shared with them all the announcements for the day. She was also an ambassador of sorts, frequently accompanying Jill in her barn until it was time for her to come out and share the latest about Building Blocks.

 Some of us worried at times that Jill was spending a little too much time with BB and that it was occasionally becoming difficult to sort out the two personalities. But, overall it would be fitting to say BB the cow had been fully adopted into the Building Blocks Tutorial family and the family of Cherokee Park United Church.

 In the life of the church year, today is Trinity Sunday, and as such it is an especially fitting Sunday to celebrate and give thanks for this important ministry in which we have been engaged for the past 27 years.

Trinity is the term the church developed to speak about a God who is one, but yet who is experienced as Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit. Trinity is a way of saying that fundamental to our experience of and understanding of God is the experience of relationship. Trinity affirms that God exists as relationship, in relationship, within God’s very being, and with all that exists.

 It is out of awareness of God as three in one, drawing us into this circle of connectedness that the Apostle Paul says, “all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God….” It is from God, says Paul, that we have received “a spirit of adoption.” BB the cow is not the only one who gets to claim adoption. Through our adoption we are no longer strangers to one another, but rather recognize each other as brother and sisters, part of the family of faith and through the family of Christ’s people we embrace the fullness of God’s family to which we all belong.

Relationship is central to God as Trinity and relationship is central to what it means to be part of the community of faith.

As a ministry of Cherokee Park United Church, it should come as no surprise a core value for Building Blocks Tutorial has been the creation, development and nurturing of relationships. To be sure Building Blocks has been deeply invested in helping children improve their academic performance, their reading, writing and math. But, the foundation for learning was always the relationships tutors developed with these young children. Tutor relationships were in turn strengthened by the relationships we sought to encourage among them, with Jill and also with us as a community of faith. It is in support of this relational approach to learning that we hosted meals for the children, tutors and families, each and every fall and spring. There could hardly be a more appropriate Sunday to celebrate Building Blocks than Trinity Sunday, which reminds us that we live, move and have our very being through the one who exists as relationship.

 Yet, as the Apostle Paul is quick to remind us, life giving relationships are far from automatic. Paul draws a sharp contrast between what he refers to as living according to the flesh and living by the Spirit of God. Some mistakenly believe this duality Paul speaks about is a choice between this world and the next as if Paul is negating our human needs in favor of a separate spiritual realm. If this were the case, we would have no need to engage in a program like Building Blocks Tutorial because the only thing that would matter is whether these children and their families have eternal salvation.

 When Paul says you have a choice to make between living according to the flesh and living by the spirit, Paul is saying our choice is between the flesh, which serves only our own separate interests and the spirit of God, which is about living in relationship. The Children’s Story we read about Thomas the Toadily Terrible Bully is a story about living according to the flesh. Thomas thought that the only way he could get his needs met was by being a bully. “Move it or lose it!” Thomas told the other Toads. “I’m bad to the bone.” Turns out Thomas did not make a very good bully. The other toads just giggled. “You couldn’t hurt a fly”. But along the way Thomas discovered something better, Thomas discovered a new friendship with Gomer.

 According to Paul all of us are at risk of becoming indebted to this bullying approach to life, the ways of the flesh. It is the relationship denying ways of the flesh that keep alive the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, believing that violence is a stronger guarantee of security than is the hard work of building relationship. It is the bullying ways of the flesh that make mass incarceration and outfitting police officers with weapons designed for warfare a preferred alternative to building relationship with the communities they serve. It is the bullying ways of the flesh that causes us to treat the earth as a short term commodity to be exploited rather than a presence with which we must be in relationship. It is the bullying ways of the flesh that puts profits ahead of people, material gain ahead of caring about one another. It is the bullying ways of the flesh that leads us to exploit differences of race, gender, and orientation so that one group can maintain a place of privilege over another. We become indebted to, addicted to this bullying approach to life, living by the flesh, which is why Paul uses such stark language in saying, if we live by the way of the flesh we will die. But, if we live by the spirit, in relationship as children of God, we will live.

 One of the blessings we receive through Celtic Christianity is an awareness existing among Indigenous peoples around the world that the only way to truly live is in relationship with all of creation. The Celtic Cross, with its interlocking patterns and embracing circle, is a symbolic reminder that we have been adopted into Trinitarian a community of relationship.

I hope I don’t do a disservice to Sister BB by noting she was a puppet. It certainly in no way distracted the children who were a part of Building Blocks. If you observed those children relating to BB you would immediately recognize how important being in relationship was for learning to be encouraged. When BB was out of her barn, children and adults would often come up and say, “hi BB” and then only secondarily say, “oh hi Jill, didn’t notice you standing there”.

This week I visited with Jan Howe, who as many of you know lost her companion and service dog, “Pepper.” Jan shared that people often came up to them when together and would enthusiastically greet “Pepper” and then secondarily say “Hi Jan.” Brother Pepper was a dog with whom Jan and others who knew Pepper lived in relationship.

None of this would come as a surprise to our Celtic Christians ancestors who knew full well that the spirit of God continually draws us into an ever widening circle of caring and relationships. The very first place Michele and I visited in our trip a few years ago to Ireland was an ancient Celtic monastery founded by Saint Kevin of Glendalough. Like many Celtic Christian saints, Kevin was often on speaking terms with animals, birds and fish. One of the stories told about Saint Kevin is how he held his hand out for a bird to land. The bird proceeded to build a nest in Kevin’s hand. Kevin stayed that way, arm outstretched, until the eggs were hatched and the babies were ready to leave the nest. Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit, weave together in Celtic Christian awareness drawing us into relationship with one another and all creation.

We are adopted into this family of caring, this community of relationship. The Apostle Paul does, of course, remind us that living by the relational ways of the spirit, rather than by the bullying ways of the flesh, does come with a cost. If we care about one another, we suffer with another, we suffer with Christ. There is a real sadness and sense of loss, with the closing of Building Blocks Tutorial. There is a great sadness and feelings of loss when we lose companions as Jan did this past week. We enter into relationships knowing that our hearts can and will be broken by the heartaches and sadness that carrying always entails.

Yet, even with the suffering, even with the sadness we would have it no other way. As the Apostle Paul says, we are “children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if in fact we suffer with Christ so that we may also be glorified with Christ”.

Our glory, the glory of God, comes through relationships of caring. It is the foundation for justice and building the Realm of God for which the prophets longed and Jesus said is near at hand. It was 27 years ago that we began the ministry of Building Blocks Tutorial. We had no idea it would last this long. Nor did we know how many lives would be touched by Sister BB, Sister Jill and all the brothers and sisters who have shared in relationship with the hundreds of children whose lives were touched.

We are called to live in relationship with one another and all God’s creation. Building Blocks Tutorial has been one expression of what it means to know God as Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit. The question posed to the prophet Isaiah is a question of faith we are asked every day, “Who shall I send and, who will go for us?” The children who attended Building Blocks Tutorial experienced firsthand the answer to that question.

**Isaiah 6:1-8**

*One of the book’s written by Old Testament scholar Water Brueggemann is entitled Prophetic Imagination. Prophetic imagination is at work today as the Prophet Isaiah describes the vision he had when he found himself called by God as a prophet. In humility, the Isaiah at first is reluctant, feeling like many of us feel, that he was not up for the task. But, when the question is posed to Isaiah, “who shall I send?” Isaiah knows there is only one answer he can give. “Here am I: send me”*

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

**Romans 8:12-17**

*In our second lesson the Apostle Paul, writing to the church in Rome, reminds us that we face an inescapable tension with the dominant ways of the world, which Paul refers to as the flesh and the ways of the Spirit, that draws us into relationship with one another and with God.*

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh — for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ — if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.