



University Christian Church – Austin

C. Kutz-Marks

Abide in Love

Easter 5, b, May 10, 2009

1 John 4:7-21ⁱ

Those of you here for Mothers Day in 2008 may remember that last year I'd shared with you the story that despite my intuition of failure in the process, at the urging of a plant lover here, I had bought a little cucumber plant and had dutifully prepared to plant it in the crumbled limestone of the hill in our backyard that Becca and I euphemistically call "dirt." I dug the hole, pulled the tenacious weeds from the surrounding area, put some good potting soil in the hole around it, built a little dike around it trap whatever moisture might roll down its hill, and dreamed of the processes leading to it growing healthy and strong..... while at the same time mentally preparing myself for it to die. What was I thinking when I bought this thing? Could anything grow in this stuff but the yucca plants and wildflowers?

As I look around our yard, or you look around a park or green space, everywhere you look you see successful propagation of new life: the yucca plants & the wildflowers drawing the bees to their attractive flowers to prepare for a new generation; live oak trees and sago palms with their female and male aspects providing what is necessary to produce yet another generation; rosemary, mint & the basil plants so fast to flower that we have to pinch off the flowers to further

their growing of leaves. They all do so well in propagating themselves that a cucumber plant with my care, might make it... right?

The final report of last year's cucumber crop: with all of our care and tending, one deformed cucumber that didn't mature enough to be food... for us at least, but I did notice that numbers of ant-like creatures fed on the cucumber to be; other tiny creatures fed on the cuke plant itself and no doubt were blessing whatever creature – myself in this case- that had provided their dinner!

Sometimes the nurturing spirit gets almost crazily out of hand. Our daughter Marie while in her early school days in Michigan had a friend whose family was absolutely nuts over animals of all kinds. Inside their house they cared for birds, hedgehogs, snakes, rabbits, guinea pigs, ferrets, mice, rats, snakes, and so many more kinds of animals, just everywhere. Marie remembers coming home from a birthday party there telling Becca, she thought you could recite the whole alphabet with their animals: birds over the bathtub; chinchillas in cages; lizards in the living room. What is it that moves a family to voluntarily make a Noah's Ark out of their modest home?

In Isaiah 11, the ancient prophet of Israel foretells of a day when God's will and way will appear on earth at the coming of the Holy One of God; when strange pairings of caring relationships like: "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together..." we may tend to think that day is far off and quite far from the rough and tough survival-of-the-fittest principle we always see in the world of nature.

But some of you may have seen the video making its rounds on the internet these days, and I'll attach it to this sermon file posted on our web page so you can see it all, too, if you wish. [It can be seen at

<http://www.ucc-austin.org/worship/Audio%20Sermons/MothersDayVideo.wmv>] Bev

Leonard sent it me a couple of weeks back, where CBS's reporter Steve Hartman, reports from Burlington, Iowa, on a dog name Lily whose litter of puppies was all sold is shown nursing a litter of orphaned kittens in an animal shelter there. ⁱⁱ

- Another scene shows a mother cat who heard the call of a motherless faun, a baby deer, who invited the faun to nurse with her own kittens.
- The next scene shows an orphaned horse being nursed by a goat.
- And the most moving, reminiscent of the biblical passage, "the leopard shall lie down with the kid," shows a mother Leopard who in killing a baboon for food, unwittingly created an orphaned baby baboon. And then, instead of eating this baby baboon, her natural prey, she kneels down by the baby baboon and nurses it.

"Why would an animal show such grace?" asks the narrator of the video, "It's just what she [Lilly] does," says the animal shelter director of the dog nursing kittens, "Indeed, for most mothers it's just what they do, an instinct so deeply wired into them that often all they know to do is to love and care for life" the narrator closes the piece.

I'd add three words for those of you who've seen the Zachary Scott's Theatre's current presentation of "The Grapes of Wrath" or those of you who can remember back to your reading of the novel, I'll just say: THE LAST SCENE.

There is something else, something other than the juggernaught motion of a merciless food chain grinding its way through our world. Something else, something that this morning Scripture draws us ponder, something that has to do with love:

4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

4:8 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

Now, in a culture where “love” talk in music & cinema is so infused with romantic associations, lets tweak the wording to be get at the meaning of these passages. Insert nurturing, caring, compassion, in the place of “love.”

Beloved, let us care for another, because nurturing care is from God; everyone who is compassionate is born of God and knows God.

Apparently, it isn't just something that human beings get to experience either in view of the instances we've heard of today. In addition to the very real principles of “survival-need” that we highlight, there is something in the very marrow of being that yearns to care of other beings, even very different kinds of beings, especially very needy creatures, and the scripture hints, **that yearning is of God.**

The great 20th century theologian and philosopher, Paul Tillich, said in defining it, ~ “**love is the drive to reunion of that which essentially belongs together.**”

So when the fullness of life, the promised age arrives, love will reign, as we have already seen in these episodes:

The wolf belongs with the lamb; the leopard belongs with the kid.

And when it comes to human beings, though we may inevitably struggle in some ways with one another, there is no doubt that we belong together

4:16 So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them....

4:21..... The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

And there is boldness in that love

4:18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.

And because fear does not rule over those faithful in heart, because worldly principles of power & mercilessness do not prevail, because the spiritually secure ones can find even in the erstwhile enemy, another child of God,

4:20 Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

“Love is the drive to reunion of that which essentially belongs together.”

Let me suggest that this understanding of LOVE is exactly what we want to lift up and celebrate this Mothers Day. Many of us, most of us, have seen in the women who have nurtured us some of the very best examples of this LOVE in action.

- They have loved us when we have been so unlovely as to be unlovable.

- They swooped down to protect us when we have unwisely put ourselves in terrible danger.
- They have forgiven us and given us a fresh new start in those very times when we have pushed them back and demanded our way.
- They have shown us, the very same quality of love, that God shows, and in doing so, have taught us the heights of what human love can overcome, while at the same time they have offered the finest glimpse of Divine love that we are ever likely to know.

So today when you take your mother out for dinner, or give her a call on the phone, or remember your deceased mother and all the ways that she instructed you, protected you, paved a positive way forward for you, REMEMBER. Let us commit afresh to do the very thing that she would ask of us. Let us pass that love along.

“Those who abide in love, abide in God and God abides in them.”

ⁱ 1 John 4:7-21

4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

4:8 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

4:9 God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.

4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

4:11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.

4:12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

4:13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

4:14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world.

4:15 God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God.

4:16 So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

4:17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world.

4:18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.

4:19 We love because he first loved us.

4:20 Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

4:21 The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

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