

“Faces of Our Faith: Belonging”
Genesis 2:4b-25

We begin this week a new sermon series about many of the unsung heroes of our faith. Their lives and stories give us wisdom for living as God’s partners in redeeming the world. Since we are focusing today on one of the stories of creation in the Bible, I would like to share with you a creation story told by Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen. This story was told to her by her grandfather, an Orthodox rabbi. “In the beginning there was only the holy darkness, the *Ein Sof* (No End), the source of life. And then, in the course of history, at a moment in time, this world, the world of a thousand thousand things, emerged from the heart of the holy darkness as a great ray of light. And then, perhaps because this is a Jewish story, there was an accident, and the vessels containing the light of the world, the wholeness of the world, broke. And the wholeness of the world, the light of the world was scattered into a thousand thousand fragments of light, and they fell into all events and all people, where they remain deeply hidden until this very day. Now, according to my grandfather, the whole human race is a response to this accident. We are here because we are born with the capacity to find the hidden light in all events and all people, to lift it up and make it visible once again and thereby to restore the innate wholeness of the world. It’s a very important story for our times. And this task is called *tikkun olam* in Hebrew. It’s the restoration of the world.

And this is, of course, a collective task. It involves all people who have ever been born, all people presently alive, all people yet to be born. We are all healers of the world. And that story opens a sense of possibility. It’s not about healing the world by making a huge difference. It’s about healing the world that touches you.”

I think this story speaks deeply and powerfully to our human experience and to our mission here on earth. Each of us is gifted with this ability to mend the world and we need each person to live to their fullest potential to work together with God. Yet, we easily miss this point in ourselves and in others.

In our Bible story for today from Genesis, we hear another important proclamation of faith. It is about belonging. We normally focus on what went wrong with creation and the disobedience of human beings. But today I want to invite us to focus on the deep connection between the first humans, namely the words from verse 23, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.”

Instead of looking at the differences and all the things that separated them from each other, Adam, the first human saw in the woman a companion and that they belonged to each other.

This story of the man and woman belonging to each other stands in sharp contrast with the Babylonian story of creation where the world was created out of the slain body of the goddess Tiamat. Violence and separation were at the heart of the act of creation. This is based on what we call, “the myth of redemptive violence.” While in our story from Genesis,

the coming together and belonging were at the center of our human experience. God's work is about wholeness and our coming together and our connection to God. The temptation is to separate and to hide from that connection. We even hide from our own selves and so often feel disconnected from our own hearts and souls.

There are people in our lives who call us to focus on the love that is all around us, while there are others who lead us to focus on all that separates us from others. There are those who live by the values of the myth of redemptive violence. We are sometimes drawn to both and we ourselves sometimes play both roles. The invitation of Christ is for us to live by the example of Adam's connection to Eve, of seeing the other as part of ourselves and that in our belonging lies the wholeness of our human experience.

Who has been such a guide for you on the journey of life? Who has helped you know that you belong? Take a moment to reflect on your journey of life.

We are going to take a few moments to allow the Spirit to call to our attention one person who has helped you focus on love and who has welcomed as their own kin in the human family of God. Then, we are invited to turn to one another to share about that person. We will take two examples from your sharing time.

We will end with a story from Gerald Jamplosky in his book "Love Is Letting Go of Fear." He says, "It had been a particularly busy day. I had arranged to have a boy with terminal brain cancer and his mother fly from Connecticut to California late in the afternoon. That evening I brought them to the Center. There was a meeting that night with other children who had catastrophic illness. After it was over I took them back to my home and returned to the Center to assist in another meeting of adults who had various forms of cancer. That meeting was to be over at 9:30 pm and I was to go to a friend's house to meet some guests from India. When I started to leave the Center, there was a young man of about eighteen years of age waiting to see me. He had a beard, was untidy in appearance, and smelled like he had not had a bath in weeks.

He said he wanted to talk to me. I was tired and anxious to leave and didn't really want to see anyone who had a problem. He said he had just arrived after hitchhiking from Virginia, that he had seen me on national television show and felt guided to meet me.

My inner thoughts became quite judgmental. 'He must be disturbed to come across the country to meet me because he saw me on television.' His request seemed like a demand and an attack. I told him I had another appointment that evening and that I could see him the next day if he thought he could wait. He said he could wait.

The next day he was not able to be specific about what he wanted except to say there was something in my eyes that made him want to see me. Since neither of us seemed to know why he was there, I suggested that we meditate together and that perhaps we might get an answer. As we meditated, I was surprised to hear a clear inner voice state, 'This man came across the country as a gift to you to tell you he saw perfect Love in your eyes--something you have difficulty seeing in yourself. Your gift to him is to demonstrate total

acceptance to him, something he has never in his life experienced.' I shared with him what I had heard, and we embraced each other. I was amazed to realize that the awful odor I had smelled only a moment before had totally disappeared. Tears came down both of our faces, and a mutual peace and Love was experienced that is difficult to describe." In that moment, both recognized that the eternal connection and unity we all have, "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh." Amen.