

January 15, 2017  
John 3:16-21  
First Parish UCC, Brunswick, ME  
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## ***Loving the World***

### INTRO to SCRIPTURE

Last week I spoke about how the exponential growth in technology is exceeding the human capacity for adaptation. Today I want to continue that conversation looking at the continuum of local/global, or we might say tribal/universal. We experience this continuum in politics, environmental concerns, and religious conversation, just to name a few.

For today, I've chosen a reading from the gospel of John. This gospel begins with a global perspective "In the beginning was the Word" and makes it local "and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

John is, in some respects, the most universal gospel. However, there is another side to John, which seems to say it's Jesus...or else. It's important to remember that John belonged to a small, minority religious community whom he was trying to encourage. He was not part of a dominant worldwide religion that had power over others, which Christianity became.

The text is a very familiar passage. It is an invitation into the universal love of God, but it has been used by segments of the Christian church over the centuries to build a wall around who is "in" and who is "out" of God's realm by whether or not they have a Jesus passport.

### SERMON

Some of us remember a TV theme song (*Cheers*) that includes these words:

*Making your way in the world today  
takes everything you got.  
Taking a break from all your worries  
sure would help a lot.*

*Sometimes you want to go...  
Where everyone knows your name.  
And they're always glad you came.*

(I am glad you came.)

*You wanna go where people know  
People are all the same.  
You wanna go  
where everyone knows your name.*

We all need a place to belong, a locality of friendships and connections that serve as the "eye" of the hurricane for us. (Thomas Friedman, *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations*, pg. 358) We all need a place where we can stand as the accelerating world swirls around us.

On the other hand, we must also have an eye to the global, the universal. Our technologically connected globe has made very, very clear the physical and political reality of what spiritual gurus have proclaimed through the ages - that life is one interwoven web of connection.

A personal story of the elasticity of local and global that unfolded in our family in the last week. My husband, Ron, has been in Myanmar with a class from Andover Newton Seminary. While there he ran into someone who knows his name and is also from Brunswick. Kitty Babson was there with a group from Virginia Seminary. Kitty is an Episcopal priest who assisted in the memorial service here for Bud Edwards. And some of us worked with her husband Brad, who is on the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust board, as we developed the outdoor labyrinth. Local and global.

On the one hand, we trust  
*Jesus loves me, this I know.*  
At the same time, we proclaim  
*God loves the world.*

Not just those in our tribe: our family, our race, our religion, our economic class, our nation. God loves the world.

This weekend we remember a person who reminded us that there is only one race – the human race. Martin Luther King, Jr, called people to trust in God’s love for each person but also to lift our heads up and dream God’s dream for the world.

In his Nobel Peace Prize speech (1964), we hear:

*There is a sort of poverty of the spirit which stands in glaring contrast to our scientific and technological abundance. The richer we have become materially, the poorer we are morally and spiritually..... This problem of spiritual and moral lag, which constitutes modern man’s chief dilemma, expresses itself in three larger problems which grow out of man’s ethical infantilism. Each of these problems, while appearing to be separate and isolated, is*

*inextricably bound to the other. I refer to racial injustice, poverty, and war.*

All of these problems are based on treating some people as OTHER.

In the last years of his life Dr. King focused more and more on the issues of poverty. In his final book, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (1967), Dr. King described his vision for a universal basic income that would raise all U.S. citizens to the middle class. He speaks of the need for meaningful work but also for adequate income so that people may lead whole lives, even if there is not work available to them. King reminds us over and over again that the humanity of the individual is inextricably tied to the humanity of the collective and vice versa.

In this day and age, one of the things that spells financial disaster quickly – that drives people into poverty - is medical bills that can’t be paid. This week we have watched our national government officials take steps that appear to endanger people’s access to health insurance and health care. They treat health care as a commodity to be traded.

Personally, I have come to the position that I support universal health care – Medicare for all. It doesn’t seem morally or spiritually, or even economically in the long run, wise to have universal health care only if you can first make it to age 65. Therefore, I called Susan Collins, Angus King, Chellie Pingree and Bruce Poliquin’s offices this week to express my concern. (I always call their offices here in Maine. You get to talk with a real person.) As we all care about the global and the universal it is crucial to act locally to express our concerns, whether you agree with my opinion or not.

God loves the world. This statement is even more expansive than we've acknowledged so far. In Greek, the word is cosmos. It's not just people- not just the tribe of humanity - that God loves; it's life itself that God loves. God IS life and love. God IS.

Remember at the heart of the formation of the Jewish people – the Jewish tribe if you will – is the story of Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush. Moses asks for God's name so he can tell others who God is? God's response is "I am who I am." In other words, God is the great "I am." This gets symbolized in the name Yahweh- the personal name for God used by the Jewish people. This name reflects the Hebrew verb (hayah) "to be." God is being itself. God's love is woven into life itself.

Someone knowing of my interest in Native American spirituality recommended a book to me, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Robin is a professor of environmental biology and a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation.

In reading this book there was an "aha" moment for me.

***Yawe** – the animate **to be**. I am, you are, s/he is. To speak of those possessed with life and spirit we must say **yawe**. By what linguistic confluence do Yahweh of the Old Testament and **yawe** of the New World both fall from the mouths of the reverent? Isn't this just what it means, to be, to have the breath of life within, to be the offspring of Creation? The language reminds us, in every sentence, of our kinship with all of the animate world. (Pg. 56)*

We are all part of one interconnected web around the world and through the ages. The particularity of our religious tradition is not meant to call us away from the world. It is not meant for us to build walls of exclusion. The Way of Jesus invites us to love the world the way God does.