

May 1, 2022

Genesis 2:18-23

¹⁸Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that adam (Hebrew for man) should be alone; I will make him a helper, a companion as his partner.” ¹⁹So out of adamah (Hebrew for ground) the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to adam (Hebrew for man) to see what adam would call them; and whatever adam called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for adam there was not found a companion as a partner.

²¹So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon adam, and he slept; then God took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²²And the rib that the Lord God had taken from adam God made into a woman and brought her to adam. ²³Then adam said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Ishshah, (Hebrew for woman), for out of Ish (Hebrew for human) this one was taken.”

What I realized, fairly early on in the pandemic, was that our world, like the disciples’, was “entombed” despite the good news of Jesus’s resurrection. It is an observation about how we felt in our shelter-in-place isolation at that time. The Easter challenge was facing the difficulties of our isolation and, trusting in the promise of the resurrection, encouraging people to begin thinking about what life will be like post-entombment, post-isolation, post-pandemic.

The most important insight I learned in the midst of my pandemic isolation was the importance of community, more

specifically, the importance of community gathered together.

In my last year as pastor of Amicable Church I felt deeply the loss of Sunday mornings spent in the physical presence of the gathered worshipers. At the time I had blamed this on my being an extrovert, a person in need of interaction with others. I wondered if the feeling of loss was due to leading worship, especially preaching, to and through a laptop screen. Or maybe, the loss was due to the lack of response; the kind one gets when sharing ideas from the pulpit with nods of agreement.

All of these things certainly played a role in my own need for community and strong feelings of loss at that time, when community was absent. Now I believe something more fundamental was at play. This came into focus for me in a Providence Journal editorial piece written by Rabbi Leslie Gutterman. Rabbi Gutterman lifted up part of a Bible verse taken from the second creation story in Genesis. The verse is: It is not good that “adam” should be alone.

Reading that line made it clear to me, immediately, the importance of being present, physically, with other human beings. I knew there was a sermon in this, so I re-read the second creation story.

Let me recap: God creates man, *adam* is the Hebrew word, from the ground, known in Hebrew as *adamah*. After giving this human the breath of life God realizes that this person needs a helper, a companion, a partner. So God begins creating an assortment of animals, which *adam* names, but none of them can give him a partnership that is required for his own fulfillment. God meets this dilemma by creating woman, *ishshah* in Hebrew, grown out of *ish*, which is

Hebrew for humanity. The lesson here: We were created to be in community.

Even 4,000 years ago people knew humanity was created to be in community. It is a part of our DNA. We need to be in physical relationship with one another, if we want to experience wholeness and well-being. In preparing for this sermon I found many quotes from people who had this knowledge long before I did. I want to share two of the quotes with you here:

Robert Alan Silverstein wrote: “Many are re-discovering the healing and empowering role that community can bring to our lives. The sense of belonging we feel when we make the time to take an active role in our communities can give us a deeper sense of meaning and purpose.”

Dorothy Day wrote: “We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community.”

The Bible says, “It is not good that *adam*/humans should be alone.” The most important lesson for me in the past two years since the quarantine and isolation was imposed is the physicality of it all. We need, our bodies, minds, and spirits require, being in one another’s presence, physically.

For my birthday last year my daughter gave me a plug-in charger for my cell phone. All I have to do is lay my phone on the charger and it charges my battery. Similar to this, in some mysterious way, sitting together in worship with others is how my body, mind, and spirit are re-charged. Central to this manner of re-charging is being plugged into the receiving and giving of God’s unconditional love.

Community the formed when we teach and share God’s unconditional love, generously and in person with all.

It is my hope that, as we are now emerging from the physical distancing and masking phase of this pandemic, we will have a new and deeper understanding of the importance of community and will continue to commit ourselves to growing and deepening our community of faith here at Edgewood Church. The world needs the kind of community we are trying to live up to and into.

Now normally I would put an Amen here, but I have an addendum:

My theological belief in God’s Oneness, expressed in the interconnectedness of life, requires of me to note that, while I believe in the importance of human community and our need for physical contact with other humans, of equal importance is our oneness with all of creation. With this in mind I share with you one more quote.

Thomas Berry wrote: “The natural world is the larger sacred community to which we belong. To be alienated from this community is to become destitute in all that makes us human. To damage this community is to diminish our own existence.”

Recognizing the importance of community and the physicality of it all gives us a mental, emotional, and physical knowing about community that is foundational in our own resurrection from the shelter-in-place entombment, which the pandemic quarantine, physical distancing, and masking was.

As we move forward into whatever the new normal, post-pandemic life will be, may we remain committed to sharing with the world the importance of community by continuing to make our faith community a welcoming and loving place for all. Amen.