

May 14, 2023
Sixth Sunday of Easter

Meditation: "The God who yearns to be known"

Wow. What a weekend. All day Friday and all day Saturday was the annual spring meeting of Antler River Watershed Regional Council. On Friday, amid other business, we heard from our keynote speaker, the Rev. Dr. Lillian Daniel, who is the United Church of Christ Conference Minister for Michigan. She gave a very humorous presentation about Congregational Ministry. In the evening, after supper, Therese Samuel, the Minister of Right Relations and Social Justice for ARWR, HFR, and WOWR, gave a presentation on a remit that is before the church regarding removing structural barriers for the Indigenous church within the UCC. All regional councils and the governing body of every pastoral charge is asked to vote on this by next March.

Yesterday we had another powerful keynote speaker, the Rev. Dr. Jessica Hetherington, a UCC minister from the Ottawa valley. Her topic was Eco-theology, which, given the rapid rate of climate change, is something of great concern to all of us. Especially so since the UCC has set a goal of reducing our carbon footprint by 80% by 2030..... which is only seven years away. Geo-thermal heating anyone? How about solar panels?

And then, yesterday afternoon at 4:30 was the Celebration of Ministries service at First United Church in St. Thomas. The Rev. Dr. Lillian Daniel was the preacher, and Nancy Vandenberghe was recognized as a DLM, Jennifer Prince was commissioned as a Diaconal Minister, and Andrew Gilliland was ordained as a Minister. What a celebration it was. We rocked First United.

And now today we gather for more celebrating. We celebrated the sacrament of baptism and welcomed Jamar into the family, *and* we celebrate mothers, and not just our biological mothers, but all who have mothered us.

But I digress. At this point you really want a spiritual message. Where do I start?

When I was a child my father was rarely around. He was always at work, or some other place. When I got old enough to think about perhaps someday having a child of my own, the thought terrified me. I didn't have a role model. And if I did have a child, I hoped for a daughter so I didn't have to figure out what a "normal" father/son relationship looked like. Mostly, I thought that if I did have a child, I wanted a relationship with that child.... I wanted to be involved in their life.

Fast forward several years, and I was a father..... and I was involved, very involved in the life of my daughter. At least until that day a few months past her eighth birthday that my first marriage ended. And then the most difficult time in my life, up until that point, started. For two years I had no contact with Christina, and not by choice.

After two years, I was given the opportunity to meet with Christina. I was nervous. I didn't know what she had been told about me and why we couldn't see each other. I didn't know if she had received the birthday cards and letters I had sent. I didn't know what stories she had told herself to explain the sudden end of our relationship. All I knew was that I yearned for our relationship to be restored..... no, that was gone.... The eight year old I had last seen was now a ten year old. Christina wasn't the same person I knew two years previous. I wasn't the same person as two years previous. I longed for a new relationship with a child I didn't know.

Paul told the Athenians he had seen an altar dedicated to "an unknown god," and he wanted to tell them about a God who could be known. And not just a God who could be known, but a God who wants to be known, just as I wanted to know the ten year old my daughter had become.

Just as in Paul's day, there are many gods that are worshipped. There is the god of consumption, to whom the cathedrals of shopping malls and big box stores are built. There is the god of sports, to whom the basilicas of Budweiser Gardens and the Rogers Center are built. There is the god of celebrity, to whom the virtual temples of snapchat, Instagram, and twitter are built. And there are many more gods. And then there is our God.

God knows us, intimately. But that's not enough for God. God wants us to know God. No, God yearns for us to know God. That's why we gather here on Sunday mornings. We gather to worship God, and to be attentive to deepening our relationship with God, that we might know God better each week. That is the one thing that sets us apart from the local Lions club. We gather to worship someone other than, someone greater than ourselves. It boggles my mind that the God who created everything that is... the tiny virus and the vastness of intergalactic space.... wants to be known by us.... wants to be in a relationship with us.

This morning we celebrated the beginning of a new relationship with God in the baptism of Jamar, and in that baptism we were all reminded of our own relationship with God... a God who yearns to be known. And, to play with the words of Rabbi Abraham Heschel, to know God is to worry about what God worries about when God gets up in the morning. May you fully know God, even as you are fully known. Amen.