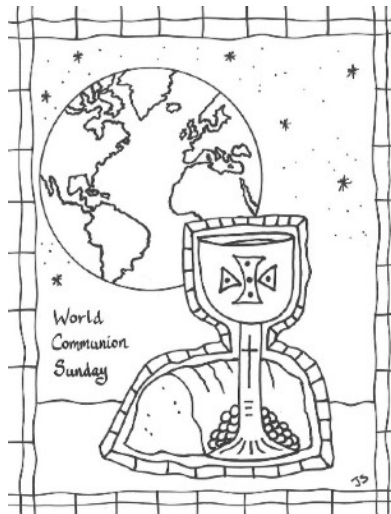


Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
The Reverend Dr Scott Everett Couper
Sunday, October 24, 2021
Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost in Ordinary Time

“We Are Created for Community”

Christian Scripture: Genesis 2:18-24



At first, I thought this Genesis reading was the craziest scripture for World Communion Sunday. I mean, Jesus is not even mentioned in the story. I thought what does Adam and Eve have to do with Holy Communion? But all week, on all my autumn runs and walks, this morning’s scripture made more and more sense to me on so many different levels.

First and foremost, in order to see this scripture in light of the bread and the wine on this table, we need to put-on new lenses. Let us see the story of Adam and Eve not as a story of the creation of humans *per se*, but rather the story of the creation of a *relationship* and the creation of the **first community**.

The first verse Peter read for us this morning perhaps best captures it: God said: "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). I know many introverts might question that assertion. For example, my son often finds other people, at best, inconvenient, and, more often than not, anxiety producing. Yet, even introverts crave relationship. I find introverts desire relationship as much as extroverts. It is just that they value fewer relationships that are more deeply experienced rather than a whole social scene that includes more thinly experienced relationships perhaps numbering in the hundreds.

God's assertion that it is not good for the man to be alone is also being debated on a societal level. Today, the mandating of masks and vaccines for COVID-19 is being hotly debated in the United States. While the word 'united' is one of the words of our nation's name (*United States of America*), we are anything but united. There is, for good and for bad, an individualist streak in our national consciousness that almost seems to argue with God by saying, "No, it is good for the man to be alone!" Many national mottos articulate this individualistic ethic. 'Don't tread on me'; 'Live free or die' are just two. And this individualistic ethic has even challenged public health measures as anti-maskers and anti-vaccers believe the wearing of masks and being vaccinated to be purely personal choices without consequence for others around them. Even though as members of society

we are not alone, sadly there is an ethic in the United States that understands that decisions should be made *as if* we are alone.

After God stated that it is not good for the man to be alone, God opened Adam's side and removed a rib to create a woman. Again, rather than interpret this story to be about gender and then enter into contemporary debates about our rigid adherence to binaries, let us interpret this scripture in terms of *relationship*. With the creation of a second human from the rib, we have the creation of not just of a relationship but we have a relationship that is founded on interdependence. The two beings are to be companions; they are to be partners, each depending on the other.

I believe our scripture speaks to our nation during this crucial time when vaccine booster shots are being introduced. When it comes to issues of public health, the Hebrew and the Christian scriptures can speak to society with a genuine and unique *theological* lens that affirms God's intention that when we make decisions about ourselves, we ought to take into consideration how it affects other people. God intends for us as humans to be bound together by mutuality. This is not a political position. This is a Judeo-Christian and scientific position. When God created a second person, God created *mutual relationship*.

Today, we celebrate World Communion Sunday and United Nations Day.

Most of the news focuses on the vaccination rate in Vermont (70.8%, fully).¹ Or, the news centers on the vaccination rate in the United States (69.3%, fully).² Yet, the vaccination rate for the world is only 37.3% (fully).³ In places like South Africa, where my daughter is, the rate is 18.6%.⁴ In Haiti, right on our doorstep, the

¹ COVID-19 Vaccine. Found at:

https://www.google.com/search?q=vaccination+rate+in+vermont&rlz=1C1CHBD_enUS938US938&og=Vaccination+rate+in+vermont&aqs=chrome.0.0i512j0i390.4236j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8, accessed October 23, 2021.

² COVID-19 Vaccine. Found at: https://www.google.com/search?q=vaccination+rate+in+UNited+States&rlz=1C1CHBD_enUS938US938&ei=2qd0Yc-rA8imqtsPgl9oAs&ved=0ahUKewjPgNyx5OHZAhVik2oFHQBDD7QQ4dUDCA4&uact=5&og=vaccination+rate+in+UNited+States&gs_lcp=Cgdnd3Mtd2l6EAMyBQgAEIAEMgYIABAWEB4yBggAEBYQHjIGCAAQFhAeMgYIABAWEB4yBggAEBYQHjIGCAAQFhAeMgYIABAWEB4yBggAEBYQHjIFCAAQhgM6BwgAEEcQsAM6BAGAEEM6CAgAEIAEELEDSgUIPBIBMUoECEEYAFVCV5AVYoIMGYKOGBmgBcAJ4AIABdYgB7w-SAQQ4LjEymAEAoAEByAEIwAEB&scient=gws-wiz,

accessed October 23, 2021.

³ COVID-19 Vaccine. Found at:

[https://www.google.com/search?q=vaccination+rate+in+the+world&rlz=1C1CHBD_enUS938US938&ei=2qd0Yc-rA8imqtsPgl9oAs&og=vaccination+rate+in+the+world&gs_lcp=Cgdnd3Mtd2l6EAEYADIFCAAQxAlYBggAEBYQHjIGCAAQFhAeMgYIABAWEB4yBggAEBYQHjIGCAAQFhAeMgYIABAWEB4yBggAEBYQHjIFCAAQhgM6BwgAEEcQsAM6BQgAEIAEOgQIABBD0OggiABCABBcXa0oFCDwSATFKBAhBGABQOxtYgDNg5URoAXACeACAAXqIAakMkgEDOC44mAEAoAEByAEIwAEB&scient=gws-wiz](https://www.google.com/search?q=vaccination+rate+in+the+world&rlz=1C1CHBD_enUS938US938&ei=2qd0Yc-rA8imqtsPgl9oAs&og=vaccination+rate+in+the+world&gs_lcp=Cgdnd3Mtd2l6EAEYADIFCAAQxAlYBggAEBYQHjIGCAAQFhAeMgYIABAWEB4yBggAEBYQHjIGCAAQFhAeMgYIABAWEB4yBggAEBYQHjIGCAAQFhAeMgYIABAWEB4yBggAEBYQHjIFCAAQhgM6BwgAEEcQsAM6BQgAEIAEOgQIABBD0OggiABCABBcXa0oFCDwSATFKBAhBGABQOxtYgDNg5URoAXACeACAAXqIAakMkgEDOC44mAEAoAEByAEIwAEB&scient=gws-wiz), accessed October 23, 2021.

⁴ COVID-19 Vaccine. Found at:

https://www.google.com/search?q=vaccination+rate+in+South+Africa&rlz=1C1CHBD_enUS938US938&ei=vqh0YfDKLMm3qtsPhpuHmAM&ved=0ahUKewjwu-Ge5eHzAhXJm2oFHYbNATMQ4dUDCA4&uact=5&og=vaccination+rate+in+South+Africa&gs_lcp=Cgdnd3Mtd2l6EAMyBQgAEIAEMgYIABAWEB4yBggAEBYQHjIGCAAQFhAeMgYIABAWEB4yBQgAEIYDMgUIABCGAzIFCAAQhgM6BwgAEEcQsAM6BQgAEMQCOgQIABBD0ggiABCABBcXa0oHCAAQgAQQcKoFCDwSATFKBAhBGABQo6wHWJXMB2CjzQdoAXACeACA AZoBiAGbE5IBBDluMTmYAQCgAQHIAQjAAQE&scient=gws-wiz, accessed October 21, 2021.

vaccinate rate is 0.3%.⁵ Now, what holds true for USA mutuality also holds true to international mutuality as variants of the virus can emerge from any population where it is able to replicate. Variants, as we all know, can ignite new waves of infections if they are able subvert current vaccines. Sadly, one of the worst things our country could have ever done during a pandemic is withhold funding from the World Health Organization. Positively, our country has donated 200 million vaccine doses to over 100 countries around the world.⁶ But, much more needs to be done in this respect to make sure that poorer countries are also vaccinated.

Perhaps the clearest articulation that God intends for us to be in community is the incredible statement uttered by Adam: “This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23). What a statement of interdependence, mutuality, and community! “Bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” This statement is *not* one that advocates rugged individualism nor an ethic that says ‘x, y, and z is my choice any my choice alone even though my choice can negatively or positively affect you’. The Genesis story communicates to us that though Adam

⁵ COVID-19 Vaccine. Found at:

https://www.google.com/search?q=vaccination+rate+in+Haiti&rlz=1C1CHBD_enUS938US938&ei=PKI0YfHkKs-xggfWuaDoBw&ved=0ahUKEwjx8una5eHzAhXPmOAKHdYcCH0Q4dUDCA4&uact=5&oq=vaccination+rate+in+Haiti&gs_lcp=Cgdnd3Mtd2l6EAM6BwgAEecQsAM6BAGAEEM6BggAEBYQHjoFCAAQhgM6BQgAEIAEOgciABCABBKOGglABCABBcxA0oFCDwSATFKBAhBGABQh7UFWJfPBWD70QVoAXACeACAAbUBiAHPDpIBBDYuMTGYAQCgAQHIAQjAAQE&scient=gws-wiz, accessed October 23, 2021.

⁶ Alex Gangitano, “White House: US Has Donated 200 Million COVID-19 Vaccines around the World”, *The Hill*, October 21, 2021. Found at:

<https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/577680-white-house-us-has-donated-200-million-covid-19-vaccines-around-the>, accessed October 23, 2021.

and Eve may have been two separate individuals, the two became “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24) because they were in relationship, the first community.

Now, let us look at this [Communion] table. Twelve sat around it with Jesus. It was a beloved community. And look at us who sit around this table. It also is a beloved community. And let us celebrate those with us gathered on-line at home. You too are with us in this beloved community. And as we observe World Communion Sunday, let us acknowledge that as people of faith we are one with all Christians, no matter from what country they come. And since we are children of God, we are siblings to all of humanity throughout the globe. And since we are created by God like all the earth and all other creatures, we are together included in God’s salvific plan.

In Genesis, Adam and Eve became ‘one flesh’ – “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh”. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed that all those who follow him might “be one” (John 17:21). And we at this table affirm that with this bread and with this wine, we become with Jesus - “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” – when he says to us “This is my body, which is for you...” (Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22, I Corinthians 11:23). Indeed in this service, we confirm that the entire Judeo-Christian tradition, from the Genesis to the gospels, proclaims that ‘God created us for community’.

This was the Word of God. And it was delivered to the People of God. And the People of God responded, "Amen!"