

Kate's message for the Third Sunday of Lent 3/24/19 is entitled "The Great Beating Heart." It is based on Isaiah 55:1-9, Psalm 63:1-8, and Luke 13:7-9. May we all find that great holy rhythm in our own lives.

The Psalmist cries:

"O God, you are my God!

I seek you, my soul thirsts for you!

My flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water!"

It has been suggested by numerous spiritual seekers that our **awareness** of God, the mystery that holds us all in life, begins at our beginning, in the womb, where we are held and rocked in the amniotic waters in which we sleep and awaken to the sound of one steady heart. Thus our **search** for God, our longing for that ultimate reality, starts as soon as we are breathing our own air. Now I, as an advocate for the Christian teaching of **incarnation**, which essentially affirms that the divine comes to us in the flesh, as experienced in the bodily life of Jesus, I do think our dance with God begins right in the womb. Our pre-natal experience includes the bodily awareness of being held, nurtured, filled, and entranced by the sound of a steady beating heart.

One of my favorite images of God is that of the great beating heart of the cosmos, providing the circulatory spark, sustenance, and rhythm of life. My first thought for a message today was to simply provide the heart's drum beat for ten minutes allowing us to sink into a restful contemplation, letting our own hearts find their rhythm in God's. Some of you would love that...and it would drive some of you crazy! First rule of the pastor – **know your people!**

But there is another reason I decided against it. For though, yes, we can experience God floating on the waves of rhythmic sound, God is also in the **unnerving chaos** of being born. God is there in the upheaval and loss of our watery paradise. Why? Because **love does not stand still**. Divine love calls us to greater and greater life and is not satisfied until every being knows this greater life.

Jesus' parable about the fig tree may be about this very thing. The tree is just sitting there. Not dying. Not fully living. Bearing no new fruit. The owner of the vineyard does not want it just taking up space. The gardener doesn't either. But he wants to give that tree its best chance to bear life. New life. Unlike the owner, the gardener has likely planted this tree, spent some time with it, has a relationship with it, and so wants it to bear fruit! Live its purpose and come alive! Exactly what God wants for us.



Now, not being a fig tree, I know nothing about what this costs that tree. But being human, I do know that coming fully alive and living our purpose often involves risk and loss. My own epic birth story is of a baby girl trying to be born, but with every movement forward, kept pulling back because the umbilical cord was wrapped around her neck. But **life demanded** I be born, with all its attendant risk and loss. Fortunately for me, I was helped into the world by skilled and heroic hands and my wail of grief immediately became my mother's song of joy.

We **cannot stop** the motion of life, no matter how many times my niece, Melissa, complains about her growing two month old Emma, "It's just all going too fast! It's going too fast!" But life need not feel like a runaway train, if we ground ourselves in the love that sets it all in motion. The love of God that creates and shapes the universe is **vast and deep**. The Psalmist calls it "steadfast", something reliable that our souls can cling to. Isaiah reminds us of an everlasting covenanting, a relationship grounded in that steady love, there for us to depend on, to wrap ourselves up in when our

hearts are hurting and seeking rest.

But we must remember that the love of God is also a **creative love**, as scientist Ilia Delio reminded us earlier. It is the “love that generates new life and urges cosmic life toward greater unity.” “We,” she says, “are an unfinished species...grounded in an infinite depth of love, thus openness of our lives to love, and what this means in terms of creatively reinventing ourselves as persons in evolution, is the challenge ahead of us.”

Now, I don't really like her term “re-inventing” ourselves as persons, that sounds too much like hubris, we human beings didn't invent our lives in the first place. We received them. However, in the course of evolutionary love, how about re-invigorating, reshaping, retooling, or a good Lenten word, **repenting** – which essentially means to **change direction**. **To turn around and start swimming upstream** against the current of our present culture so that we might harness the steady life-giving flow of divine love.

For you know as well as I do that the direction we are going in now is heading toward death and destruction, possibly the end of the human species. We seem to love our weapons more than we love our lives. We mind our money more than we mind the future of our children. We idolize our tribe and our tribal leaders more than we respect and revere this God-given planet and the miracle of life that has been evolving for millennia. In this armed, polluted, and dangerous world, the time for tribal living and warring is now over. For our own and God's sake, we must turn around!

It will not be easy. We need an **evolution**. The fig tree must start bearing fruit, and so must we. So, I wondered this week, what type of fertilizer do we need? What will be taken up by our roots and sink into the depths of our souls and strengthen our will to bear newness? First, we need to recall this: Our hearts do not beat alone. We are all held in the cosmos of a great beating heart that is every minute willing us to new life, sustaining us when the birth pangs start, and passing on to us the love that is the fuel for our evolution. We need that beating heart **and** we need one another when we get weary or frightened or feel anything holding us back.

So when we gather as church here in worship, in our upcoming book study, or Council meeting, Trustees, Missions, Circle, or prayer, or wherever we are one or two gathered in the presence of the beating heart, we must ask – what are we here for? Why are we doing this? What's the point? The **point** is it is time for a **rebirth**. For fresh and new fruit. For a whole new voice to pierce the air! And yes, there will be loss. But oh, there will be life and joy! Amen.

