

CONNECTIVITY

“When you pick something up by itself, you find that it is hitched to everything else in the universe.”

John Muir

CONNECTIVITY. The word has become a familiar one in our contemporary vocabulary. It is a word whose meaning has evolved even the internet has evolved over the past thirty years. When we think of connectivity, we tend to think of social media and all the ways in which we live in a connected in this “wired world” of ours.

This morning, however, I use the word to mean something very different. I use the word to refer to the link that exists between us as human beings and the rest of God’s creation. It was John Muir who put it very succinctly: “When you pick something up by itself, you find that it is hitched to everything else in the universe.”

It’s true. We are linked together in ways that we might not and often don’t imagine. Chief Seattle gave voice to this understanding when he wrote: ***“Humanity has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.”***

In case you were wondering, Chief Seattle was not talking about the world-wide web, but the web of creation. His point was the same as John Muir’s. We are connected, we are bound together, indeed, we are “hitched to everything else in the universe and what we do to the web that binds us together, we do to ourselves.

We know that, of course, from an intellectual perspective. We know that burning fossil fuels has consequences for the atmosphere. We know that polluting the sea is, even now diminishing the fish population and damaging its’ great coral reefs. We know that the overuse of chemicals and pesticides has created a long list of environmental concerns and health problems.

There was an article in the paper recently that provided an update on the very serious and mysterious problem known as “Colony Collapse Disorder” among honey bees. As you may know, there has been growing concern among scientists and farmers about the disappearance of large segments of the honey bee population and the potential for catastrophic agricultural loss due to the lack of pollenization. The article detailed some of the recent findings among scientists and steps that were being taken to remove certain chemicals that have traditionally been used in pesticides and garden sprays.

What we do to the web, we do to ourselves. We know that and yet, for whatever reason, we often find it difficult to act upon that knowledge. We are reminded almost daily that our world is a fragile place and that the web of creation is starting to pull apart. The evidence is clear and the looming danger is readily apparent.

There was a cartoon in the Wall Street Journal in which a child is saying to his parent:

"If your generation doesn't learn to save the planet, it won't matter if my generation can't learn to read or write."

Out of the mouths of babes. That child was speaking the truth. For the sake of our children and our children's children, we must learn to save the planet. We know that. We understand that. Why then, do we see to go on with our lives as if it weren't so? Why do we choose to pretend that we can continue to view our planet primarily through the lens of a consumer rather than the lens of a conserver?

That is, I think, the question that we all must wrestle with—the question upon which the fate and the future of creation as we know will hinge. The actual planet, of course, will survive even our most catastrophic environmental choices, but the same cannot be said for the populations of plant and animal life—including human life—that now populate the earth. The future of those populations is, by no means certain.

Although we are tempted to conclude that as human beings, we have a certain autonomy that separates us from the creation of which we are a part, the truth is, of course, that we are not autonomous, but "hitched together" with everything else in the universe. What we do to the web, we do to ourselves. This is the lesson that we are learning the hard way.

In our lesson from the Book of Genesis, the second creation story, the newly created man is given the privilege of naming the animals. Now, this, of course, is a detail that we often tend to skim over as we read this account. But I would like to take a moment to focus upon the symbolic significance of it. When you stop to think about it, the act of naming another holds a certain significance, even a sacred significance as evidenced by the tradition of christening (or naming) a child.

There is then, something very powerful, even holy, in this simple act of giving names to the animals of the earth. It implies a connection--an intimate connection between the man (humanity) and the animals he names. It also implies a responsibility for taking care of that which he has named. Thus, we find in this ancient metaphorical story of the origin of humanity and creation itself, an understanding of the fundamental link that unites and connects every living thing. We make a critical mistake when we choose to ignore this link and pretend that there are not consequences.

So it is this morning that I would like to lift up and celebrate this "tie that binds" us all together. I believe, you see, that if we are able to recognize this link not only intellectually and scientifically, but emotionally and spiritually, we will be much more inclined to make the changes that are critical for the survival of the planet as we now know it. When the agenda of saving our planet becomes less something we "have to do" and more something that we "want to," something that we are positively passionate about, then the prospects of truly making a significant difference increase exponentially. This challenge will not be solved merely by the head. It will only be solved when we combine head and heart and hands. The desire for needed change will come not just from what we think in our heads, but also from what we feel in our hearts.

Let me illustrate this fundamental point by talking to you about my friendship with Zechariah who just happens to be my dog. As you can see, Zack is a Border Collie. We got him when he was approximately eight weeks old through a Border Collie Rescue organization. In the eight, almost nine, years that Zack has been a member in good standing of my family circle, he has become much more than a pet to take care of. Zack has become my trusted friend who knows me, who respects my moods and loves me unconditionally, nevertheless. He gets the morning paper from the drive way, comes when he is called and has become a neighborhood fixture in our court--willing to chase any ball, from soccer to tennis, at any moment. Our neighbor kids next door will sometime ring our door bell and ask if Zack can play. And, of course, Zack is always more than willing!

While it is true that Zack cannot speak in conventional ways, there is no doubt in my mind that he does speak in his own unique combination of whines and howls and high pitched squeals of delight. Every time the garage door goes up and I pull into my drive way, Zack squeezes under the opening door in his eagerness to be the first to welcome me home with leaps and licks. Whether I have been gone for half an hour or for all day, the greeting is the same.

Many of you know exactly the scenario that I am describing. Even those who have cats (which I do as well) can recognize that in their own unique and reserved way, they too extend their welcome and even though they try to hide it, they too, are delighted to see you. Perhaps you have seen this video on **Youtube**. I think that it says it all!

There is a link between us and our pets that cannot be denied, nor should it be. It should be celebrated for what it is--an invitation to live with a deep love and respect for the web of creation of which we are a part.

I conclude, this morning, with a story that Marti Sketchley sent to me via email. Perhaps you have seen it as well. I'll leave it to you to draw your own conclusions...

This story serves to remind us of what we already knew: We, as living things, are all linked together in the great web of God's creation. What we do to the web, we do to ourselves. And that, of course, can be a beautiful and wonderful thing...or it can be a harmful and destructive thing. The choice is ours to make and we make it every day that we are privileged to live on God's good earth.

With the resources of our planet diminishing and populations expanding, we must act now with bold decisiveness to care for the web of life of which we are a part. Time is running out and important choices must be made and they must be made now. If not now, tell me when...