

Maundy Thursday, April 1, 2021

In celebrating the Festival of the Passover with those closest to him, Jesus ate his last meal with them. After supper, Jesus took off his outer robe and began to wash the feet of each of his disciples, setting an example of the kind of leadership which emulates how the Source of All Life and Love exercises authority in the world. Jesus seizes these last hours to teach about the events which are about to unfold for the benefit of all.

Read John 17:1-11. What catches my attention in this gospel reading?

For all to see and hear, Jesus raises his head and speaks directly to the Source of All Life and Love, **“Father, the hour has come, glorify your Son so the Son may glorify You, since You have given him authority over all people to give eternal life to all whom You have given him.” John 17:1,2.** Once again, Jesus speaks clearly about the identity of the One who sent him into the world and their relationship to each other. Out of nothing, the Source of All Life and Love spoke and in this speaking each aspect of creation came into being. Not surprisingly, each part of creation was identified as being good. As a whole, all of creation was identified as being very good. Each part came into existence with the capability of reproducing themselves among a complex set of relationships with all of the other parts of creation moving as a whole forward through time. As a part of this whole, the Source of All Life and Love placed Human Beings into a very intricate set of relationships already in place. Human Beings were provided with opportunities to learn how to walk among all that Creator provided and be filled with awe. As a part of this creation, Human Beings were also given the capacity to care for not only each part of creation but for the whole of this creation with all our hearts, with all of our souls, with all of our minds, and with all of our common strength. Then, at a certain point in time, the Source of All Life and Love sent the Eternal Word into creation as a unique individual with a specific mission to accomplish for not only Humankind but for all creation. Jesus identifies the Source of All Life and Love as being the One who gave him life under miraculous circumstances or more directly as his Father. Among those who watched him heal and listened to him teach over three short years, Jesus commits himself to walk the last part of his journey in this creation secure that his Father will glorify him and that he will accomplish all that his Father set out for him for the benefit of all Human Beings and for the whole of this creation. Jesus speaks plainly. Jesus points out that his own authority to bring wholeness to the lives of broken people and to speak good news about the generosity and awesome power of the One who sent him into this creation is the same authority as held by and exercised by his Father. It is amazing to learn who will benefit when the Son comes to the end of his journey. Both the Righteous and the Unrighteous will benefit. Both Humankind and the whole of this creation will also benefit, even if some Human Beings do not consider the parts of this creation as beings in themselves and bearing the identity of Creator.

As those closest to him watch and listen, Jesus continues to claim that he has been faithful in the work which the Source of All Life and Love has set out for him to accomplish during a span of time, walking over a particular portion of this creation, and among a certain collection of Peoples. Like the Father, the Son seeks for all Human Beings and for all of creation to share the same relationship as the one shared by the Father and the Son, experiencing the fullness of Life and Love.

Reread John 17:1-11. What is god saying to us?

In her book **BRAIDING SWEETGRASS: INDIGENOUS WISDOM, SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE, AND THE TEACHINGS OF PLANTS (Milkweed Editions Canada, 2013)**, Robin Wall Kimmerer recounts what she learned from lichen which clings to granite boulders left by retreating glaciers in the Adirondacks. Most have their edges rounded when these were rolled along until the ice no longer could grab and hold them. The Elder whom Dr. Kimmerer examined stood tall with sharp edges, being as big as a dump truck. This Elder had veins of quartz which formed a sharp edge at the top and steep sides too difficult to climb. During the post-glacial era, this Elder stood as part of a cold desert of rubble and scraped rock. In the short summers, the sun baked the boulder. In the long winters, snow blasted the surface of the rock. Without soil, this land was treeless. It was a forbidding environment for pioneers to settle. However, lichens arrived on the currents of air to settle the landscape as miniscule particles. Without roots, lichen does not need soil but clings to the granite, beginning as reproductive particles known as propagules lodging in tiny fissures and pits on the surface of the bare granite. These tiny particles provide enough protection from the wind and hold rain in microscopic puddles. This was enough over the span of centuries to cover this Elder with a layer of grey-green lichen, becoming a thin coating of life. Dr. Kimmerer observed this Elder to be covered with “raggedy ruffles of green and brown” known as *Umbilicaria americana* which can grow to be half a metre in size but is usually measured as being as large as the span of a hand. Tiny circular lichen cluster around a larger circular lichen like chicks around a mother hen. Without leaves or a stem, lichen is a vegetative mass of tissue known as thallus, curling up at the edges in a chaotic sort of ruffle and exposing a black underside appearing crisp and grainy like a charred potato chip. At the centre, a short stock known as an umbilicus anchors the lichen tightly to the rock like an anchor. Lichen are not plants but are two beings, one is a fungus and the other is an alga. These two individuals are very different from each other when separate. However, when these two individuals are joined together, a new organism emerges through a symbiotic relationship. The algal partner is a collection of single cells gleaming like emeralds and bringing the gift of photosynthesis to the partnership. With sunlight and air, alga is known as an autotroph, making its own food in the form of a sugar. However, the algal partner cannot find the minerals that it needs. The fungus partner is known as a heterotroph, unable to make its own food but relying on the carbon harvested by others. The body of the fungus sends out a network of delicate threads, searching for minerals and then absorbing these molecules through its surface area. The alga and fungus exist in a reciprocal exchange of sugar and minerals, behaving as a single entity. Together as one organism, algal cells are imbedded like green beads in fabric woven of fungal filaments branching out known as hyphae. Some fungal threads protect the algal cells from intense sunlight while other fungal threads pierce the algal cells to take the sugars produced by the alga and to transport these sugars to various places in the architecture of lichen. The woven fungal threads also hold rainwater so the algal cells remain productive for longer periods of time. At the bottom of the organism, microscopic hairlike extensions known as rhizines help attach the lichen to the rock. In attempts to bring alga and fungus together, scientists discovered that only in harsh and stressful conditions did these two species come together to form a symbiotic relationship. In her observations of the Elder in the Adirondacks, Dr. Kimmerer learned from lichens that “when conditions are harsh and life is tenuous, it takes a team sworn to reciprocity to keep life going forward” and that “in a world of scarcity, interconnections and mutual aid become critical for survival”.

When the rock is dry, the lichen shrinks and become taupe in colour, making the rock appear to have scabs. However, lichen has the capability to wait long periods of time without rainwater, surviving drought. As the first raindrops fall, lichen transforms from a dry taupe organism into a sage green life form. In a few minutes, dry scabs become a tender green skin. The thallus begins to move, stretching and flexing as water expands the tissues of this organism. Where the umbilicus anchors the thallus to the rock, the soft skin becomes a dimple with little wrinkles radiating outwards from this centre, appearing to become a belly button. On vertical surfaces, these navels dry out at the top and curl up at the bottom edges. As the lichen ages, the bottom of the lichen become as much as 30% larger than the top, creating a trough which begins to hold debris. Over time, soil is formed in these troughs and eventually falls to the base of the Elder. In this way, lichen prepares the landscape for mosses and ferns to grow, followed by grasses and flowers to flourish, and then forests to take root and raise their branches upward.

Reread John 17:1-11. What does God ask us to be and do?

Jesus is prepared to complete his journey, walking the way of the cross and offering himself for all to experience new life. Be open to seek how the Source of All Life and Love is bringing new life into being in this creation now. Let us be prepared to step forward on our respective journeys to accomplish our own part in what Creator, Eternal Word, and Great Spirit has given us the gifts and creative energy to accomplish.

David Franks