

“Blest Be the Tie that Binds....”

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church
Sunday January 24, 2021
by The Rev. Catherine Somerville

Beginning with the story “The Invisible String” by Patrice Karst.

Liza and Jeremy, the twins, were asleep one calm and quiet night. Suddenly it began to rain very hard. Thunder rumbled until it got so loud that it woke them up.

“Mommy, Mommy!” they cried out as they ran to her.

“Don’t worry, you two! It’s just the storm making all that noise. Go back to bed.”

“We want to stay close to you,” said Jeremy. “We’re scared.”

Mom said, “You know we’re always together, no matter what.”

“But how can we be together when you’re out here and we’re in bed?” said Liza.

Mom held something right in front of them and said, “This is how.”

Rubbing their sleepy eyes, the twins came closer to see what Mom was holding.

“I was about your age when my mommy first told me about the Invisible String.”

“I don’t see a string,” said Jeremy.

“You don’t need to see the Invisible String. People who love each other are always connected by a very special String made of love.”

“But if you can’t see it, how do you know it’s there?” asked Liza.

“Even though you can’t see it with your eyes, you can feel it with your heart and know that you are always connected to everyone you love. When you’re at school and you miss me, your love travels all the way along the String until I feel it tug on my heart.”

“And when you tug it right back, we feel it in our hearts,” said Jeremy.

“Does Jasper the cat have an Invisible String?” Liza asked.

“Sure she does,” said Mom.

“And best friends like me and Lucy?” asked Liza.

“Best friends too!”

“How far can the String reach? Would it reach me even if I were a submarine captain deep in the ocean?” asked Jeremy.

“Yes,” Mom said. “Even there.”

“Or a mountain climber?”

“Even there.”

“A dancer in France?”

“Even there.”

“A jungle explorer?”

“Even there.”

“How about an astronaut out in space?”

“Yes, even there.”

Then Jeremy quietly asked, “Can my String reach all the way to Uncle Brian in heaven?”

“Yes, even there.”

“Does the String go away when you’re mad at us?”

“Never,” said Mom. “Love is stronger than anger and as long as love is in your heart, the String will always be there. Even when you get older and can’t agree about things like what movie to see... or what game to play in the back seat... or what time to go to bed. Oh, that’s right! You two should be in bed!”

And with that, they all laughed as Mom chased the twins back to their beds. Within a few minutes, they were asleep, even though the storm was still making the same loud noises outside.

As they slept, they started dreaming of all the Invisible Strings they have, and all the Strings their friends have, and their friends have and their friends have, until everyone in the world was connected by Invisible Strings.

And from deep inside, they now could clearly see...

...no one is ever alone.

(Rev. Catherine continues with the message.)

That is one of my favourite stories. I have shared this story at funeral services where there are young children present and I even offered it one time at a wedding, because it had been a treasured part of a bedtime ritual between a little girl, who on that day was the bride, and with her father, who was not there to walk her down the aisle.

No one is ever alone.

That message is what covenant is all about. Last week, in worship, Dave referenced the first covenant story from Genesis, the story of the rainbow that brought the message “never ever” will I forsake you. Today is Chapter 2 in the recounting of covenant, and through a story told late one night, where the light from a billion stars pierced the darkness, an old couple are told that they will have a future, as vast as a nighttime sky. A window in our understanding is thrown open upon the nature of divine love and the promises of faithfulness.

No one is ever alone.

God’s people cannot make their way to Good Friday without stopping at the markers along the road, these covenant stories, and hearing again their messages of abundant love poured upon a seeking people. The question God’s people are invited to consider as we make our Lenten way is this: When the promise of a future seems like a distant dream, how can we possibly remember? Or in other words: What do we trust to give us our life back?

For Abram and Sarai, it was all about a “yes”; “yes” to relationship, “yes” to the land, “yes” to the greater call they heard to care for one another. You can’t help but remember that these two had not been sitting idle since Ishmael had been born to Abram’s servant Hagar, back when Abram thought he could solve his problem of no children through a woman who had no say in her treatment.

They had had ample opportunity to learn to trust God without knowing for sure how things would turn out. This trust led them to leave their home in Haran, without a map, heading towards the land of promise. It allowed them to endure the grim vision of what lay in store for their descendants in the land of Egypt. It may even have been what saved their marriage.

They were deeply flawed and yet they remained faithful. With no evidence that they will ever be parents to a single child, much less the parents of a nation, they continued in relationship with God and with one another. Their trust was unconditional.

In years to come, three distinct religions will spring from this trust, claiming Abraham as their grandfather in faith. Their grandmothers will be different, but not their covenant with God. God will be their God and they will be God's people. No one is ever alone.

Friends, the challenge of this time we find ourselves in, right into the midst of Lent, and heading into the second year of a pandemic lockdown, is all about trusting in the One who gives us life, leaning into faith, and remembering whose we are.

What captures my imagination in the story of Abram and Sarai is that they never stop remembering that they were connected to God by love, much like an invisible string. The work of Lent is to make our own strings of connection stronger, so that we can weather this storm of pandemic, so that we can live our days well, so that we can see our way to Easter and the promise of Life.

In the psalm Dave shared just a moment ago, Psalm 22, curiously, the same one Jesus would turn to as he was dying on the cross, the psalmist tells us how to keep covenants. Praise God, the psalmist says. Even when it feels like your heart isn't in it, praise God. Even in Lent. Even, especially, in a pandemic. Remind yourselves whose you are. Remember. Tell the stories to yourself. Rainbow after rain. Night sky filled with stars. Pay attention to all the things that take your breath away. Praise is the framework of our relationship.

Praise God when you first wake up. Take a deep breath and say thank you for the gift of this time, this very day. Praise God.

Praise God when you sit at table for your meal. God is great and God is good, let us thank God for our food. Praise God.

Praise God when you go for a walk or do your stretches. Consider how fearfully and wonderfully you are made. Praise God.

Praise God when opportunities present themselves to serve others, and be the hands and feet of Christ in this world. Praise God.

Praise God when you get into a jam, but you have the courage to ask for help; none of us make it through this life on our own. We need help, lots of it, along the way. Praise God.

Praise God when you read something new and interesting, something that takes your mind down a brand-new path. Praise God.

Praise God as you do your work, making a difference, providing for yourself, or your family. Praise God.

Praise God when your understanding is challenged, and someone's views or opinions stretch your orientation in the world. Praise God.

Praise God when you spend time with a friend or connect with your nephew. These moments are the fullness of life. Praise God.

Praise God when sadness comes, even when you receive bad news of death, because that pain reminds you that someone was known, taking up good space in your heart. Praise God.

Praise God when you laugh out loud, so loud that people turn their heads and wonder what you are up to; praise God when you are gifted with a quiet moment of joy, those times when you feel so loved, so good. Praise God.

Praise God at the end of the day; name the things for which you are grateful. As the old hymn reminds us, "Count your blessings, name them one by one." Praise God.

That's how we do it. That's how we keep those invisible ties to the One who is our life. On this, the second Sunday of Lent, may we each find the wisdom to say: "Blest be the ties we make in our lives; blest be the ties that draw us near, as close to God as breath, all wrapped in such Holy Love for us." No one is ever alone. Praise God.