

2019 09 08 – Wonderfully Made

Genesis 1:24-31

Psalms 139:1-6, 13-18

My first week back from vacation this summer was filled with stories of people in our congregation who had fallen and broken a bone or two. It seemed like every day I heard of someone else who needed surgery or who was now wearing a cast or a sling. I remember commenting that falls and broken bones are supposed to happen in the winter when the sidewalks are covered in ice, but this was summer! It was as if our congregation's collective body was breaking down.

Aging can do that to us. As we get older we start feeling aches and pains in parts of our bodies we had previously taken for granted. Our bones lose their strength and break more easily. We get tired faster and our bodies force us to slow down, to work and play at a reduced pace. Our eye sight and our hearing start to go and we require glasses and hearing aids to help us interact with the world. We start to learn more than we ever wanted to know about the amazing world of pharmaceuticals.

One of the things that I've noticed in recent years is that, when talking to friends and family, our bodies – in particular, their infirmities - have become a major topic of conversation. My brothers and sisters are scattered across this country and every time we talk on the phone or gather together we end up comparing our lists of ailments. Twenty or thirty years ago this would have been the last thing on our minds.

But even as my siblings and I go over our recent visits to the doctor and our growing lists of medications, we also marvel at the body's ability to heal itself. We give thanks for our mother's successful hip replacement, our niece's operation to correct scoliosis, our brother's recovery from a badly broken leg and my own recent cataract surgery. We praise God that our sister's lymphoma is still in recession twenty years later and that our sister-in-law is back to work after her stroke.

Here at First United we are also giving thanks for bones that are mending: for people that are in rehab, for folks who are returning home and for those who are moving from wheels to canes and who will soon be walking on their own. As the psalmist wrote our bodies are "fearfully, wonderfully made." Their ability to heal and to compensate for that which does not heal is awe-inspiring.

Psalm 139 is one of my favourite pieces of poetry in the Bible. I love the part where the psalmist cries out to God saying:

It was you who formed my inward parts;

you fashioned me in my mother's womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully, wonderfully made.

Wondrous are your works; that I know very well.

I am comforted by the assurance that God loved and knew me even before I was born and that Sacred Love was the creative force behind my being.

Today Marie also read a few verses of the creation story as it is told in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. This story is another reminder of God's role in the creation of humankind. It states:

Humankind was created as God's reflection:
in the divine image God created them;
female and male, God made them.

And the passage ends with words:

God looked at all of this creation, and proclaimed that this was good – very good. Evening came and morning followed – the sixth day.

This story affirms our status as beloved children of God and notes that we are part of God's good creation. God loves us just as we are.

The sad thing is that many of us find it hard to really appreciate and love the bodies that we have been given. Some of us believe that our bodies are too short or too tall, too large or too small, too fat or too thin, too damaged or too scarred. Barbara Brown Taylor, a well-known author and preacher wrote:

I came late to the understanding that God loved all of me – not just my spirit but also my flesh. Like many young people raised in the fifties, I grew up with a lot of questions and unearned shame about my ripening body, which was not ripening in a way that matched any of the movie posters or Playboy magazines by which female beauty was measured in those days. When the movie *Barbarella* came out, starring Jane Fonda in a black vinyl bodysuit, I gained a new nickname meant to mortify me, which it did. (*An Altar in the World*, pg 41).

I'm sure many of us have had our negative body image confirmed or inflamed by cruel nicknames and other forms of teasing or bullying. Sometimes it's hard to remember that we were created by God and the Holy Mystery loves us just as we are.

Barbara Brown Taylor goes on to say:

When understanding finally came – not by reason but by faith – the first thing I understood was that it was not possible to trust that God loved all of me, including my body, without also trusting that God loved all bodies everywhere. God loved the bodies of hungry children and indentured women along with the bodies of sleek athletes and cigar-smiling tycoons. While we might not have one other thing in common, we all wore skin. We all had breath and beating hearts. Most of us had wept, although not for the same reasons. Few of our bodies worked the way we wanted them to. The vast majority of us were afraid of dying. (*An Altar in the World*, pg 41).

I also believe that when we learn to love and respect our bodies in the way God loves them, then we will also recognize with reverence the rest of God's creation. We will love and respect the bodies of our neighbours no matter how much they differ from our own. We will look out at all of creation and see beauty not only in the spotted fawn of spring but also in the dying leaves of autumn, not only in the soft fur of the bunny, but also in the sharp talons of the hawk.

God's creation includes not only the amazing diversity of humankind but also the vast multitude of plants, animals, birds and fish. It includes the land on which we

stand, the water that we drink, and the air that we breathe. Just as we love ourselves, and our own bodies, we must also love and care for the earth and all that lives upon it.

God blessed [humankind] and said, “Bear fruit, increase your numbers, and fill the earth – and be responsible for it! Watch over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things on the earth!”

We, like all of God’s creation, are “fearfully, wonderfully made.” Even as our bodies age and we begin to recognize their frailty, let us give thanks for the glorious bodies that we have been given and for the good earth on which we thrive.