

September 20, 2015  
The Causes of Life: Connection  
Colossians 3: 12-14  
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Do you remember the story of Autumn Veatch from this past July? She was the 16 year old that walked away from a deadly plane crash that killed her grandparents. Autumn said that one of the things that kept her going as she made her way through the woods; hungry, wet, cold, and afraid – **was the thought that she would never be hugged again**...she wanted to live so she could be hugged again ---so beautiful in its simplicity ---she chose to move forward when death and the risk of death was all around her -- because of the longing for connection

Humans are social creatures. We thrive on our connections to each other – families, friends, neighbors, faith members, and fellow citizens. Connections are like the breath of air on which our very lives depend. (Leading Causes of Life, Pg. 65)

We have begun a worship series inspired by a book entitled “The Leading Causes of Life” by Gary Gunderson and Larry Pray. The first leading cause of life is **connections**.

Of course it is not just human to human connections either:

\*Our bodies and all of the processes going on within us, are all about connection from the tiniest of micro-organisms within us, to the heart muscle pumping blood through our veins. I heard a scientist say, “We think we are an individual, but in reality within us is a community of organisms”.

\*Of course our very survival depends on how well we steward our connection to nature – all of it, from the air to the water, to the creatures – tiny and small to great and tall - that populate the earth. Yesterday I was fortunate enough to be in a kayak on Lake Union for a while and later in the day, took a walk around Greenlake. It was wonderfully windy – which seemed to increase my alertness to the dark, choppy water under me in the boat, and the incredible trees with their whistling leaves, on my walk. It was so beautiful and alive – and it all seemed so absolutely vital to our human ability to truly-be-alive.

\*We are connected to pets that are like children to us, who thrive on connection as much as humans do. They wait for us at the window – they hear our voice and tails begin to wag; they seem to have a sixth sense for grief and come near when tears fall.

\*We are connected to specific geographical places, places where significant memories were made as well as places where our ancestors came from where we find a deep sense of identification, even if we don't live there.

\*We are here as an expression of our connection to God – to a Higher Power, in which our lives depend, that leads us beside the still waters and prepares a table for us of sustenance, even in the presence of challenging times.

The list could go on and on and on...

Connections cause and foster human life – many, many connections – ones we can see and others we cannot see. Of course some connections cause severe harm and disconnection. Perhaps that is why it is necessary for us to have many and varied connections – when one fails, something or someone else is there, or will be there – in time. We humans are incredibly adaptable and able to create new connections as old ones fail or circumstances change.

In the “Leading Causes of Life”, Gunderson talks about his time in a small, land-locked Southern African nation called Lesotho. It was there that he learned of a South African word and concept called “Bophelo”. It is a word and concept that affirms the oneness of the many connections. They do not see human relationships, our bodies or nature - air or water; health or illness, life or death, as separate or disconnected pieces. It is all about wholeness – it is an “ensemble” that creates the music of life.

For example – when the author was seeking to learn about how faith and health work together in their community, their answer was a reflection of “bophelo”. They replied:

“The mountains – they are the source of our water, a place of safety, symbols of things that do not change...And the rivers and the roads which bring us together, allowing us to visit other villages, and our relatives, which bring goods to us...And the fields which grow out food...We give thanks for the doctors and nurses too.”

Nature – infrastructure – food – friendships – doctors – nurses – water – God – villages - Faith and health were not distinct entities, they were one working ensemble that made the music of life.

At the heart of the creation of religion and spirituality is the desire to connect. The word “religion” itself means “to bind back”, to connect. (Pg. 69) Gunderson writes in his book that part of what has helped congregations continue is their ability to “connect people beyond the lines of blood and money.”

They generate health and wholeness because of how they connect people, and we have been doing it long before there were printing presses or cell phones. (Pg. 72) When people stay and invest in a community such as this one, people get to know one another in meaningful and many-faceted ways. These relationships gain depth and resonance, over time when the focus is on respect and care.

The reading we heard from Paul’s letter to the Colossians is about the quality of congregational relationships. It is the qualities Paul speaks of that enable our relationships to be deep and abiding. Paul writes: **With God’s help ---We seek to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, and humility...we seek to bear one another’s burdens and learn to practice forgiveness...**

And in practicing them in this community we deepen these qualities and tools and take them with us into all the other connections and relationships that create the ensemble of our lives.

Congregations can be a very special place for connections. Here we are bound to one another, not by blood or money --- but through the love of God...here we seek and affirm our connectedness to God.

**THIS congregation** --- is a life line – a place of connection. In this place there are memories of friends who have come and gone – who have died or moved – pastors who served and cared. Childhood memories for some like Liz Roach, Julia Marshall or Betsy Hubbard who were here as children and teens. Others hold memories of raising children here in Sunday school and

Christmas pageants --- and for others the connections are much more recent but no less significant or meaningful.

This last week I performed a Memorial Service for a gentleman named Robert Smith who attended here with his wife Jane and three children in the 60's and early 70's. Though they have not been involved here for decades – their connection brought them back here to celebrate their father's life.

This congregation has been a life-line of connection for many people for 70 years for all kinds of reasons.

Each of us (hopefully) received a ribbon when you came in this morning. If you feel so moved, I would like to invite you to share a 1 minute story or word about how this congregation is a lifeline for you/a life-sustaining connection for you.

And then to symbolize that connection, Scott will help you connect your ribbon to the ring that is suspended from the ceiling.

Eventually ---whether we speak or not --- all of our ribbons will be connected --- and will rise up in celebration of the life-line and the connections we find here...