

## A Shared Becoming

June 4, 2023 at First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

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*Texts: Genesis 1: 1-2:4a  
Matthew 28: 16-20*

*Let us pray: God of infinite manifestations, free us of shame that confines and judgment that destroys. Bring healing to the wounds of being told we are too much or too big or too proud or too young or too old or too queer. Ground us in the truth that sets us free: We are the work of a Divine hand – the holy lives in our flesh. Wherever we struggle to believe, meet us there. In Christ we pray. Amen. (by M Jade Kaiser)*

Well, that certainly was a long reading from Genesis this morning that we were dealt from the lectionary. The length of it reminds me of a recurring comment that we've been making as a staff- that of course this has been the longest month of May we can remember in the recent past. Last week at our meeting as we sat down to do our planning Dan's first words were: How is it still May? And I have to say I've been feeling similarly. The warm and sunny weather we have been having lately before this weekend brought a cooler gloomier forecast has prompted within me a yearning for the hope-filled days of June- when summer has just begun, and anything feels possible. That inner knowing of summer being a time of exploration, creativity, and indulgence never left me even after I aged out of the wonder of hearing the nighttime sounds of loons at summer camp and running barefoot after ice cream trucks with salty hair and no concept of a schedule. And I know it's only the 4th of June, but this year the summer season is calling to me with a siren's song that I just can't shake. Can anyone relate?

Something I also associate with summer is transformation, a season of changes and growing, the months out of the year that we lean into parts of ourselves that have gone unexplored or that have needed tender care. Summer has often meant a rebirth for folks who suffer from seasonal depression, a shift in routine for families with school aged children, or with a simple chorus of birds outside the window it is a reminder that we are a part of the world that God created out of chaos. We don't even get our own day in the creation story. We share day 6 with "every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." With the natural world all around us in the summer we bloom into who we are becoming in a new way, connected to all that is and to God's Spirit. Even though it's been a few weeks I am still thinking of our confirmation students who spent a year exploring this journey of becoming with us and were celebrated for this hard work. Oftentimes becoming who we are or who we will be is a difficult and

winding path of discovery that turns out to be longer than we could have expected. It's a co-creation that happens in the midst of community and with the help of God's Spirit as we discover what is next for our lives and how we relate to the creation around us- whether that happens at age 6 or again at 60.

Becoming is a process that can't be undertaken alone. Even God wasn't alone when God created us. In verse 26 the text says, then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness;" There is a communal aspect to God even as God creates the community of humankind.

The words of M Jade Kaiser in their litany for becoming describe the process of this self-knowledge unfolding so well. Let us listen together now. They say:

To become is a lifelong process.

Nothing is constant,  
not even the self.

We evolve in the midst of narratives meant only for some  
and ways of being made narrow by fear and power.  
We must, then, have the courage to listen to the truth of our own lives,  
to the wisdom that comes from within –  
responding without resistance or need to control,  
but with welcome and curiosity.

This is what ensures our becoming is an unfolding  
of our truest self....

This is loving and being loved.

Celebrating new beginnings that excite.

Holding risks together.

Leaning into unknowns with the promises of support and companionship.

This is loving and being loved.

Listening to the future calling uniquely to each of us in the midst of all of life's noise.

Helping one another find our place in the shared labor of collective life.

Supporting each other in what it is, the world's ache is asking from us.

This is loving and being loved.

To say, for the first time,

"This is who I am.

This is the truth of my body.

This is what I know about myself.

This is my name, and this is where my path is leading me."

And to have it heard. Have it received. Have it affirmed.

And then,

to say it again,

and again,

as we change

and as the world changes,

and to have each proclamation greeted with an open-armed embrace:

This is loving and being loved.  
There is no me without you.  
We shape one another.  
The Sacred that birthed us  
weaves our lives together  
so that we can only find ourselves through shared becoming.  
For my journey and all its winding ways.  
For yours.  
For all the saints who labored for what is,  
all the kin whose lives made ours possible.  
For all those yet to come for whom  
living our truths today will mean breaking possibilities open for them tomorrow:  
We pause. We give thanks. We acknowledge.  
This is loving and being loved.”

I just love these words that encourage us to see our becoming not as a singular event, but as an ongoing creation in touch with the Sacred that birthed us and weaves our lives together. In our passage from Genesis God calls our moment of becoming good, telling the sacred story that we are made in God’s likeness, that we are beloved.

I remind us of this truth today, not because it’s a complicated one. Not because it hasn’t been said before many times. I remind us of our becoming and that it is good and relational and sometimes takes longer than expected because as we enter the month of June and celebrate Pride this year, for some of us our own becoming has been met not with joy and a declaration of our goodness, but with exclusion and hatred, with death dealing words and life-threatening actions, perhaps even with internalized shame. If you are wondering if the fullness of who you are is beloved by God, it is. And if you are having trouble believing that in your body there is grace for struggling with processing our own belovedness in a wider world that is cutting off the humanity of LGBTQIA folks every time we look at our news feeds.

For this reason, this month, saying that all are good and beloved in our becoming is not enough. We are called in by our God to be a community that makes each other’s lives possible. One trans pastor I follow on social media called in cis pastors and allies to speak about what we have learned from trans folks in our sermons this June. She asks in her post: “I need you to watch for who might be driving cars into our parades, for who might be ready to shoot us. I need you to give money to trans people to relocate out of Texas and Florida, and for their medical and basic living needs. I need you to learn about mutual aid and to give to it. I need to know you’ll risk something for us.” Monica Maher, one of our community ministers, might share what this kind of advocacy for the LGBTQ community looks like

when she preaches in a couple of weeks here at First Church. Just this morning I woke up to news that my home church's trans flag was burned again last night. This fight is happening here, not in some far-off place. So, as we begin the month I ask us to consider what is at stake for us all as anti-trans legislation that limits health care access, our right to bodily autonomy and the freedom to create family for ourselves sweeps our country.

Pride this year is yes, about much needed fun and self-expression and all of us becoming our full selves in the midst of community and perhaps a good party or two. But now, more than ever, celebrating Pride is about becoming the kind of community and the kind of people who advocate for all of God's beloved to feel that they are safe and free to live life and live it with abundant joy. In the Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus appears to the disciples after his resurrection he says, "remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." How might we embody this presence of Christ to each other in these days of fear and misuse of power? How do we help create a world where all are loved, and all are free? Yes, the first step is speaking life giving theology- that God spoke all people in all their diversity into existence as good. But that's not enough. We must be willing to risk something for each other, to promise to be with those who are suffering now, to know we are people of faith who are ready to show up to protect our neighbor from harm and that we can trust to receive that same care too. This pride month is a chance to be embodied beacons of the truth that love is stronger than death. We have been called to be the community of love that supports the becoming of us all, even as we look to the long road ahead. We must, too, know that God is with us in all of our struggles to become, as God was in the beginning and will be until the end of the age, no matter how long it takes. Amen.