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**October 18, 2009**  
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**Genesis, Star Trek, and the Wholeness of the Universe**  
Genesis 2:15-24

How many times does the word “love” appear in this passage?

I John 4:7-21

Beloved, let us love one another...those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

Space—the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship, “Enterprise.” Its five-year mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life, and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before. Now we’re really going to find out who the geeks are in this congregation. Who remembers the episode of the original “Star Trek” television show called “The Devil in the Dark”? It’s one of the classic original shows—the one with the Horta, a silicon-based life-form that has been killing off the miners in a mining colony and the Enterprise has been called in to save the day. You remember it? Now, this is an episode with some sad, sad special effects, including a two dimensional drawing of the mining operation, underground tunnels that have studio floors, and a monster that looks like a combination of your grandmother’s old rug and a very large, overcooked, pepperoni pizza. But somehow, in spite of its 7<sup>th</sup> grade scenery, in spite of the cheesy dialogue and the bad grammar of the opening, Star Trek had one, undeniable genius, that shows up in this episode—it makes you think about the possibility that life and the value of life might be broader than you imagined. In this episode, this killer pizza monster turns out to be the last of an intelligent species, which is simply protecting its young from the miners, who have been tunneling into the egg nursery. When Kirk and Spock reveal these facts to the miners, they suggest to the miners that they might allow the Horta eggs to hatch and use them to build tunnels, through which they can mine their minerals.

When Star Trek hit the airwaves in the late 1960’s, it was too radical to be truly successful. During those times of intense racial and intergenerational strife, it seemed farfetched to see humans of all races (including half Vulcan and even Klingon) struggling to get along. Even now, you’ll hear endless interviews about how Star Trek was so far ahead of its time. In a way, it was, but I would submit to you that Gene Roddenbury, the creator of Star Trek, was simply playing off of an ancient wisdom, one that is at the core of our nature, but that is so deeply in conflict with our innate fears, that we must relearn it with each generation. This wisdom, that we are all not only connected, but intertwined and completely dependent on one another, goes back at the very least to the oral tradition of Genesis, and is the source today of our understanding of how we are designed to share out that which is given to us.

Look at this second Genesis story. First of all, I would ask you to conjecture on why there was a need for a second creation story. The first one took care of every single thing on the earth and above the earth, established God as supreme creator, set man above it all, and proclaimed it good. What else is there to say? Well, clearly, someone sitting around a campfire one night was not satisfied and said to the children of the tribe, “Would you like to hear a story about first man?” And the children, who didn’t have TV’s, said, “Sure!” And so the storyteller said, “Well, you may not know that when God made man, God made him with his own hands, shaping the arms and legs, giving him a nice smile, rolling out long spaghetti pieces to make his hair, and then blew into him the breath of life!”

“Oh!” cried the children. “We didn’t know!”

“It’s true. And then God set the man loose in the garden and the man thought it was beautiful. But pretty soon, God began to notice that the man was moping around, kicking stones and throwing peach pits into the lake. And God said, ‘Why, he’s lonely! I’ll make him some companions.’ Now, God didn’t want to scare the boy, so he just said, ‘Here, son, here’s something new—give it a name.’ And so the man did. And he gave lion a brave name and hyiena a silly one; he gave dog and cat quick names, so he could give them a call (not that the cat ever came). And when he had named them all, he was still sad! So God took him aside and put him to sleep and he took a rib out of the man’s side. And from the rib he made a creature who was like the man, but not exactly. And he fashioned her face, and he made each strand of hair and he breathed into her the breath of life!”

“Oh!” said the children.

“Yes!” said the storyteller. “And the man woke up and he saw her and he was so pleased that he gave her part of his name and he said, ‘Now I’m happy because I have a companion who is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh!’”

True, it’s patriarchal, but listen to the wisdom of this story! The people who told this story over and over until someone thought to write it down believed to their very core that God made people for each other. That the beings of the earth are physically intertwined under the guidance of the one who made them. We know it—we feel it—or we would have written this story out of our book as unnecessary eons ago.

And this is not just a single occurrence in our tradition—it pervades our Bible—it pervades the beliefs of people of faith. Look at the I John passage. How many times does the word “love” occur? Twenty-three—about 23 times in a passage that is 15 verses long. When you learn Greek, this is one of the first passages they teach you, because—look at it! If you know 10 Greek words you can just about take care of the whole thing. Take a piece of paper and write these words in the form of a triangle—“love,” “God,” and “one another.” Then, take a pencil and go back and forth—you’ve got most of the passage—love God, love one another—God loved first, you love God, love one another. Do you love one another? Love God. God is love, so love one another. Back and forth, intertwined—an absolute web of words. They aren’t just connected—you couldn’t write this passage without any one of those words—they’re interdependent, symbiotic. Like the yin/yang symbol of Buddhism, in which each side of the balanced equation has a little piece of the other inside it, this passage is our symbol of unity, our reminder that we are not meant to do anything alone.

Now, I know that you know that it’s October, which means we are talking about stewardship, like good Protestants everywhere are doing. And in this church, as in many churches, I suspect, we do it very carefully. We are encouraged to give cheerfully, and no one mentions amounts—we are careful not to differentiate between the rich and the not so rich, to welcome whatever is given and we are told God really wants us to give. And we try so hard to be cheerful givers. So hard. And not because we are bad people or hypocrites either—it’s just hard when you know how much your mortgage is and you know how much the things you need cost and you know how much the things you want cost to happily pass over money that might go toward something else. I can’t tell you how many conversations I’ve heard in churches over whether people should tithe their gross income or their net—as if there were some lost passage somewhere that outlined it like an income tax form. “Thou shalt give 10 % of all thy earnings prior to the FICA withholding and the paying of health insurance premiums. If thou has child care expenses, thou canst pay them before calculating thy 10% tithe, but only if thou first submittest form 1059Q with the proper tax ID number.” It’s not in there. What is in there is Jesus’ admiration for a widow who gives her last cash over to the temple. And what a strange story that is—I’ve always hated that story. Why would she do

that? It's so dumb! She gives over the last available cash she has and now someone's got to feed her! Why on earth would she do that?

Well, here's where we come to understand what that ancient wisdom we were talking about, that we're designed by God to see ourselves as interconnected to the other people of the world and therefore to give part of what we have been given away, teaches us about stewardship. Here's what I know: it is not my job to tell you whether you should tithe. It is not my job to tell you whether that tithe should come before or after you pay your taxes. It's not my job to make you feel guilty about any wealth you have, to ask you to apologize for your lifestyle, or to beat yourself up over your financial success or lack thereof. What is my job is to remind us all that we are not designed to be alone. Well, I know that! Of course I know that! I'm here, aren't I? How is that related to stewardship? The answer lies in the answer to my question about the widow's giving of her mite—she recognized, in some very potent and powerful way, that she needed the temple more than she needed food. How could that be? How could she need the temple more than food? How could she need the symbol of her connection to Abraham and Moses, how could she need the rituals that tied her to her mother and her mother's mother, and her mother's mother's mother more than the bread that kept her alive? How could she need the words of spiritual comfort that tie her to the very God of the universe...oh! That's it—that's got to be it! There's no other reason for her to have given that mite, unless you want to say brainwashing or fear, in which case why would Jesus hold her up as an example? The answer is—he wouldn't. Jesus didn't prey on fear or feed on mindlessness. If she is our example, then it must be that what she brought was the humility of understanding that her lunch mattered less than her connection to the world around her, the people around her, the spirit of God within her.

I have a great example for you. I'm going to say a word—a name, in fact—that the young people who went on the mission trip to Miami this past summer will recognize. Now, they're generally well-behaved, and I don't expect them to jump out of their seats when I say this name, but pay attention to their response when I say the name "Denasia." Denasia is one of the little girls they met through Touching Miami with Love and they have stories about Denasia. I can tell you that they all remember her prayer, which I cannot repeat all of, but which started, "Thank God for booty..." And I can tell you this—these young people, who have every need met, who are not only well-loved and cared for by their parents but who have extended families who love them and the incredible, mind-boggling, I-can't-believe-anyone-would-let-their-kid-miss-out-on bonus of having an entire church that loves them, these young people are better, they are more than they were, for having met Denasia. Not just that she was cute—Denasia was funny, but she was difficult and required quite a bit of interaction and intervention. It's more than just the fact that she was a personality who caught their attention—Denasia and the other children that our young people worked with, took these young people to a world they did not even know existed—they opened our children's eyes, made them more compassionate, more intelligent, more perceptive—better people. And they could not have had that experience without Denasia and all those children in the Touching Miami with Love program. Our children needed them.

I remember when our Sudanese friends came and they needed us—boy, they really needed us. But consider this—what would this church be, right now, without them? Where would we be? Would we know anything about how difficult it is to maneuver through government form after government form after government form just to get basic needs met? Would we have any understanding of the difference between a human being's potential to achieve something and their ability to find a path to gain the opportunity to achieve? Would we be even close to the understanding that every anonymous child that we see pictured on television in some war-torn country has the potential to get a four-year degree from a college and go on to offer their extraordinary gifts for the good of the world? We needed them—we continue to need them. They

take us into the world, with a sense of patience and grace that we all aspire to, in a way that we could not have without them. We are utterly dependent on them.

What I'd like to offer today is a way of thinking about giving that alters our perspective, slightly—that might help out with that “cheerful giver” thing. Instead of being about what we should give because somebody else needs something from us, what if we give because it's good for **us**, in the same way working out is good for us? What if we begin to think of giving as something we need, something as important to us as our daily bread, something that keeps us connected and recognizes, not just that people need us, but that we need them. This will require some humility. It will mean that when we look in our wallets for something to hand the guy standing at the highway exit with a cardboard sign, what we say to ourselves is not, “Boy, I'm really helping this guy out—what a good person I am!” but instead, “I better get this guy some food—I need him!” Now, I'll be the first to admit to you that the likelihood that that guy is going to eat the hamburger you buy for him, become inspired, attend medical school and come up with the cure for the rare disease you get 10 years from now is pretty slim. I would ask you, however, to remember the faith to which you belong. This is the faith of impossible expectations, that asks us to have the mind of Jesus—it is always calling us up, beyond our abilities, and it is always in our business, in our thoughts, into our motivations, pushing toward the next step and the next step.

Can we do it? Can we work, for example, for better schools for all our children, not just our own children and not out of guilt or duty, but because of our understanding that there are hundreds of kids out there mired in the mess of substandard schools and we need them? They are potential doctors and artists and teachers and lawyers and bankers and ministers and we need them! And for every one lost to despair, every one lost to a system that does not provide them with what they need to thrive, we suffer their loss.

And it goes beyond the poor—this goes beyond mere financial stewardship. Our recognition that we need each other should pervade every element of our lives. Let's start with the basics—women need men, men need women. I'll tell you how I know women—all women—need men. I have worked in an all-female work environment. And some days, you come in, and the estrogen is flying, and the drama has reached Everest-high levels, you long for someone with a little testosterone to come in and say, “Hey! Knock it off! Get back to work!” And men need women. Frankly, even if they could procreate, I doubt if men could actually survive without women. I think more than half of them would perish in puberty, soon after saying these four fateful words: “Hey guys, watch this!”

All you yellow-dog Democrats out there—do you know how much you need the Republicans? God bless your tender little hearts, what would you do if you had free reign to create all your programs, with no one to say, “I beg your pardon, but how do you expect to pay for that?” For all that democrats might have struggled with the last Republican presidency, it should not escape their notice that there has not been another terrorist attack on this country since 2001—no small thing for those of us living in a community that exists so close to a nuclear power plant. You Republicans out there—do you have any concept of where you'd be without the Democrats? Where would we be if our country were completely focused primarily on the bottom line of businesses, solely on the end-of-test scores of our students? Where would we be without some liberals giving faces to those walked on by businesses, those left behind by their schools? Take a look at any pairing and you get the same thing. Gay people need straight people, and straight people need gay people to remind them that love is love is love is love. Children need grown-ups and grown-ups need children to help them remember wonder and fun and possibility; disabled people need able people, and able people need the disabled to help them understand their own humanity. Africans need Americans, and Americans need Africans (and Asians, and Europeans, and on and on and on). What if this attitude pervaded our lives, our sense of what we had been given? What if we looked at

our marriages with a sense of stewardship and wanted that solid relationship for others? What if we looked at our politics with a sense of stewardship, and instead of wanting to knock each other over the head with it, looked for ways to share what was good about what we believed? What if we looked at our own faith with a sense of stewardship, and wanted for others all the gifts we have by being brothers and sisters in Christ?

There's an old Paul Simon song in which he sings, "I am a rock, I am an island." He says, "I have no need of friendship/friendship causes pain/it's laughter and it's loving I disdain," and makes reference to a "freshly fallen silent shroud of snow," which apart from being a brilliant piece of alliteration, is also a vivid picture of this person who insists that he is self-sufficient, while he is surrounded by images of cold and death and need. He ends the song with the line, "And a rock feels no pain/And an island never cries." That is one end of the spectrum, and I suspect that very few of us here are that far gone. But a person's attitude toward life is not black and white, but a continuum, and while we might recognize our need for our family and friends, our need for our co-workers and our brothers and sisters here at the church, it may very well be that to say to ourselves, "I want to work at Room at the Inn because I need those guys," is a stretch we've not yet acquired.

Here is the other end of the spectrum. I could use a Jesus example, but we've heard those stories so many times, that it may be hard to see them differently. So I'd like, instead, to offer you this story from the novel *I Know This Much Is True* by Wally Lamb. This is a story of twins, two boys who grow up in the household with a weak but loving mother and a tyrannical step-father. When they become young adults, it becomes clear that one of the twins is schizophrenic. It's a complicated tale, which I won't try to explain here, but I will say that the novel is the process of the healthy brother coming to understand how much he needs his schizophrenic brother. Toward the end of the novel, the healthy brother discovers that his biological father was part Wequonnoc Indian—a fact which his brother knew, but Dominick, the healthy brother, did not. Dominick is talking to a man whom he has known all his life, and whom he has thought of as an Indian, an other, and has now found to be his cousin. Dominick says, "So...how do you become a Wequonnoc?"

The other man, Ralph, hands Dominick a stone, "a simple, smooth gray rock... 'When a Wequonnoc baby's born, (he says) the women take the cord and form it into a circle. Cinch it, so that it has no beginning or end. Then they burn it in thanks to the Great Creator...Wequonnoc's pray to roundness,' he said. 'Wholeness. The cycles of the moon, the seasons. We thank the Great Creator for the new life and for the life it sprang from. The past and the future, cinched together. The roundness of things.'" (Lamb 883)

This is our challenge—to seek wholeness. To look for life and intelligence around us, even if, God help us, it looks like the love-child of a pepperoni pizza and a rug. To understand our own dependence, our need for each other, to give because that is what is best for us, because we are designed, flesh and bone, to need each other. And when we come to each moment of deciding whether we will give the clippings of our fingernails, or go all the way and give the rib, we are challenged to understand that if we give the rib, it will not be because we're expected to or because it is our duty, not in spite of the pain but with a stiff upper lip, but because in giving the rib, we get the beloved. We are made more complete, we are made more whole, when we give. For this is what we know of each other, and what we know of God: Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God...those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.