

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost – September 23, 2018

Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Mark 9:30-37

FOR REFLECTION

"Interbeing: If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either. So we can say that the cloud and the paper inter-are."

~ Thich Nhat Hanh (b.1926) Vietnamese Buddhist monk, teacher, author, poet and peace activist

Interbeing

There are many scholars who will testify that the disciples were teenagers. Considering lifespans 2000 years ago – and the impulsive behavior of these people who are willing to ditch their father's business and follow an itinerant preacher around the country – Jesus basically had a youth group in his care.

This text certainly indicates the immaturity of his inner circle. He was teaching his disciples...

32 But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him. While they were walking, several of them were arguing about something...

33 Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" 34 But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.

And then Jesus sits down and says to the twelve...

"Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." 36 Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

So, at one level he is addressing them as children – and he uses that metaphor for his disciples any number of times in the gospels. But it isn't a put-down. It's descriptive. And here he goes even deeper – showing respect to his child-like disciples – while teaching respect for young people in general.

Keep in mind that children were not high on the social ladder of the time. These were extraneous citizens – much like women, poor and disabled people – kept around as long as they could be useful to those in power and then discarded. So, for a Rabbi to put a child on his lap was a powerful statement.

And then he goes even deeper...

he said to them, 37 "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

The children are the parents – and the parents are the children – and all are part of God.

Jesus is talking about Interbeing. The concept of Interbeing is essentially Buddhist. Siddhartha Gautama, or The Buddha, lived 500 years before Jesus was born. But his teachings had taken hold and were taught widely in India and Nepal and beyond during Jesus' lifetime. It is even thought that during "the lost years" when nothing is written about his life – age 12-30 – Jesus traveled and studied various religious traditions including Buddhism. The man did love to walk and he loved to study. And this particular moment smacks of Buddhist Interbeing – something that is deeply meaningful in our own time.

Essentially it means that the lifeforce of all things is in us as well. We are an integral part of the web of life on this planet. We are part of one another and trees and animals and oceans and deserts are part of us. This is not just a spiritual condition or understanding – this is a physical reality.

And because of this shared essence – all things have an effect on everything else. Our behavior and words affect not only those around us but beyond – affecting communities and the air we breathe and gardens we tend. Scientists call this "The Butterfly Effect" – a scientific theory that a single occurrence, no matter how small, can change the course of the universe forever.

Another take on Interbeing comes from ancient Greek mythology: the Chimera. I've spoken about this before in detail – but as a refresher, the mythological, fire-breathing, female creature had a lion's head, a goat's body, and a serpent's tail. Over millennia Chimera came to mean anything that is monstrous or fanciful.

In our own scientific era it has come to mean "a single organism composed of cells with [multiple] distinct genotypes."

The medical definition is "a person composed of two genetically distinct types of cells. Human chimeras were first discovered with the advent of blood typing when it was found that some people had more than one blood type."

NPR had a story several years ago about a woman who needed a kidney transplant. When testing her blood-type against relatives to see if any of them might be a donor, they told her that one of her two sons was not her biological son. She had given birth to both of them so this was impossible. Further testing showed she had two sets of DNA

in her body. Over time, this was explained as a fraternal twin that had been absorbed by her in utero – so that different parts of her had different DNA. Ultimately, she was given a kidney from her husband – giving her yet another set of DNA. She is a Chimera.

What this leads me to say is that at some level we are all Chimeras. We have the DNA of our ancestors mingled within us. We have cells made up of air and water and minerals from all over the planet. And – if we are children of God – filled with the Spirit of God – we have God within us just as all of Creation is filled with God. Therefore, we are Chimeras with God – mortal embodiments of the Eternal – stardust and mud – spirit and cells.

Which means that we are inextricably connected to – have Inter-being with – all that is – including all gender identities and religious affiliations and races and beliefs. Like it or not we have Interbeing with Congress and the White House – and have an influence with every vote cast and petition signed and prayer lifted. We have interbeing with all that has come before us and all that will come after us – fertilized and fertilizer – future fossils, breath to breath and dust to dust.

We are the teenagers who left the family business to follow a social activist preacher healer and change the world forever.
We are the children embraced by a loving, respectful teacher God and welcomed into the Beloved Community.
We are the Beloved Community which is ultimately Everything and Everyone.

We Inter-Are – thanks be to God.

Scripture Reading for Sunday September 23, 2018 – Nineteenth after Pentecost – Year B

Mark 9:30-37 (NRSV)

30 They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; 31 for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." 32 But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

33 Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" 34 But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.

35 He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." 36 Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, **37 "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."**