

Scripture

John 15:9-17

⁹ As the Creator has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Creator's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants^[a] any longer, because the servant^[b] does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Creator. ¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Creator will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

"Why does a person own a dog?" Charlie Brown asks Linus.

Linus responds, "For the security of knowing that there's at least one creature in the world who likes you."

Let Us Pray,

God Who Bred Us for Love,

Be in the words and the intent of this message this morning. If there is anything that adds to the lives of the hearers, may you receive all of the credit. And if there is anything that is lacking, may your Holy Spirit fill in the gaps. But in all things, may it serve those who have chosen to be with us in this hour. In the loving spirit of Christ we pray. Amen.

Toward the end of our conversation last week, I shared with you that when I interviewed my father before he died, I asked him his biggest regret and he said that he wished that he realized that he was never alone. In addition, he gave me the advice that if I ever felt alone to, as quickly as possible, "Become a We." Because, it is out of the illusion of aloneness that we often suffer and cause suffering. And it is in authentic relating that we

are brought back to ourselves and can be a beacon that guides others back to themselves.

As a friend once told me, "True friends listen each other into being." And I think that is part of what happens when we pray or try to connect to God. Or as my dad put it, when we become the highest We--us and God. When we take part in this relationship with our Creator who sees us not as we've been or who we seem to be to ourselves or some others, but rather from the eyes of our becoming, we are listened into being. And it is when we are listened into being that we build the capacity to listen others into being as well.

But, let's face it. In our society, are we taught to listen each other into being? No we are not. Rather, we are taught to judge by what little we see by others outward appearances and fill in the gaps with whatever makes us feel better even if it means diminishing the being of others. And so, it is often very difficult for most of us to truly listen to others. Rather we listen for others to say something that we either agree or disagree with. And this is largely because we tend to use others to validate ourselves.

Now, in calling this forward, my intent is only to bring this to our awareness so that we can do something about it. If we recognize ourselves listening for rather than listening to, we can remember that we have other options. Because, in reality, I think that the primary reason is not because we are selfish or uncaring or bad people. No. If God is Love as we say God is and we are children of God then at our core we cannot be. But what I do think is that we do this is because it is a misguided way of closing the "Aloneness gap" that my father expressed.

When I look at the polarization in our society, the demonization of difference, the high levels of insecurity, the rising suicide rates, the opioid epidemic, the lack of compassion for others, the hoarding of resources, and more, I have come to see that my father was right when he said that all of these things come from the feeling and fear of being alone. And, when we are operating out of aloneness, other people--those who our tradition asks us to love as ourselves--become a means to an end. We use them to fill our "aloneness gap" and that is part of the reason why I think we make agreement so important and disagreement such a threat.

Out of our sometimes unconscious need for validation, we experience difference as a denial of our own existence. Even though we might not articulate it this way in our

thoughts or words, our invisible struggle could be expressed as, "How can I accept you as you and still be me at the same time?"

Which almost brings us to dogs.

As many of you know, a little more than two weeks ago, our family dog of 15 years, Journey, whose painting is on our bulletin cover, died. Since that time, our family has shed our fair share of tears. Yes, some of them have been tears of sadness. But most of them have been tears of joy that we were blessed to be visited by the gifts that come with being in a relationship so filled with love, that even in grief it keeps on giving.

When we talked last week, we talked about what it means to be in the image and likeness of God who is invisible. What I hope was communicated to you all was that if God is invisible, then to understand what it means to be in the image and likeness of God is to become intimate with our own invisible nature as well as the invisible nature of all things in Creation. In this conversation, my intent is for us to connect with the Love aspect of God's invisible nature and consider that when we allow ourselves to love and be loved, it is a revelatory experience that reveal us to ourselves in as much as it reveal the Source of Love itself--our Creator.

In Romans 1:20 it says, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* God's eternal power and Godhead."

What I have received from that verse for decades is that if I want to see the invisible attributes of God, EVEN GOD'S ETERNAL POWER AND GODHEAD (a word you might want to look up), then I don't need to look any further than what has been created.

Just as Richard Rohr expressed in the video we saw earlier, if we are open to it, we can see God everywhere and be always in prayer, which means we are never existentially alone. And if we are dwelling in the Presence, never alone, then we don't have to listen for what people say, whether they agree or disagree with us. But rather, we can go about the service of listening people into being. And if they are open to it, guiding them into the practice of listening themselves and others into being as well. And this is where I can let Richard Rohr be Richard Rohr and still be me at the same time. I don't agree that seeing God in nature is better than a church service anyday. Because, at its highest expression, the service of church is that in our togetherness, we celebrate the reality that

we are never alone and practice with one another so that we can live outwardly what we know to be true within--there is nowhere that God is not.

Now to dogs.

Do you remember those bumper stickers from the 90s that said, "God is my co-pilot?"

Funny story...

In my 20s, I was once driving a little fast on an empty road in AZ with a friend and they asked me, "Don't you think you're driving a little fast?" To which I responded, "God is my co-pilot." And then like a scene from a movie, here comes a police officer driving toward us on the other side of the road. The lights immediately turn on. And my friend says in a Seinfeldian manner, "Well it looks like God should've been your pilot."

But back to dogs.

In mockery of the "God is my co-pilot" bumper stickers some comic genius came up with a response bumper sticker that said, "Dog is my co-pilot." And while I know they were trying to make a joke at the expense of those who displayed the God stickers, in the end, I think the joke was on them because it turns out that those seemingly contradictory messages are closer to one another than some might think.

"People are born so they can learn how to live a good life. Like, loving everybody all the time, and being nice. Well, dogs already know how to do that, so they don't have to stay as long." According to a facebook post, these were the words of a 6 years old who offered their reason for why dogs don't live as long as people.

When I heard this explanation, it brought to mind Jesus's declaration in Matthew 11:25 when he said "I thank You, Creator, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes."

I'll be honest and admit that I didn't want Journey. Before meeting my wife, I had committed myself to being a childless bachelor for the rest of my days for reasons

similar to those the Richard Rohr expressed. I was pretty close to a hermit wanting only to work, read books, pray and travel.

But then, I met Kelly, who wanted the same things with one exception. She wanted a dog. Specifically a red and white Husky.

In a Psychology Today article, Nigel Barber Ph.D. quotes Colin Groves of the Australian National University, in Canberra, who believes that human's success as a species is partly due to help from dogs. According to Groves: "The human-dog relationship amounts to a very long-lasting symbiosis. Dogs acted as human's alarm systems, trackers, and hunting aides, garbage disposal facilities, hot water bottles, and children's guardians and playmates. Humans provided dogs with food and security. The relationship was stable over 100,000 years or so and intensified in the Holocene period into mutual domestication. Humans domesticated dogs and dogs domesticated humans."

And essentially, that is what Journey did to me. In so many ways, the life that I have today, began with a friend, I didn't know I needed who listened me into being. CS Lewis, who I can't seem to stop quoting said, "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal."

When Journey first came into our life, I honestly saw her as another creature I had to take care of. And as someone who was given and took on way too much responsibility for other people at an early age, in my thirties, I had decided that I was going to have to make a change. But, as I was soon going to learn, in so many ways, taking care of a dog was going to reveal to me just how much God takes care of me.

[Journey didn't like me.]

[If you're going to live here, you're going to have to be a spiritual dog.]

Walking Consciousness on a leash

God looks at you as if you were a little Christ: Christ stands beside you to turn you into one. I daresay this idea of a divine make-believe sounds rather strange at first. But, is it so strange really? Is not that how the higher thing always raises the lower? A mother teaches her baby to talk by talking to it as if it understood long before it really does. We treat our dogs as if they were "almost human": that is why they really become "almost human" in the end.

7 Spiritual Lessons from Your Pet

Amanda Ree for the Chopra Center

1. Present-Moment Awareness - Just as it feels good to share time with a *human* who is fully present and attentive, your pets live their lives in the moment and can bring you into that state of mind simply by being around them.
2. Acceptance, Contentment - Dogs embody, "It is what it is."
3. Non-Judgment - Although pets have the ability to discern what they like vs. what they don't, the details and qualifications of what their decisions are based on are very different from humans. Pets have a simpler approach—does it bring me fear or does it bring me love?
4. Adaptability - You get what you get and you don't get upset.
5. Unconditional Love - Your pets welcome you into their hearts and lives with an innocence and reverence that many of us, if we were to be entirely honest, rarely receive from most of our human relationships. (Homeless folks and their pets. I saw a lady with a sign the other day that said, "It's all for the dog.")
6. Loyalty - Very often, your pets know you better than anyone else in the world, and they've seen you at your best and worst.
7. Intuition Over Intellect - They combine this sensory input with their overall energetic "read," which allows them to stay more established in the heart and body than in the mind and intellect.

When Journey was dying it all flooded in:

- Journey laid down her life for me
- Dogs love everyone

In her 1969 book, "On Death and Dying," Kübler-Ross examined the five most common emotional reactions to loss:

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

RUNNING THOUGHTS

Sixth stage of grief - David Kessler - Meaning

Farewell discourse

We limit not the truth of God.

A man asks the 2nd Century Rabbinic Sage Hillel to recite the whole Torah on one leg. Hillel replies, "That which is hateful to you, do not unto another: This is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary — [and now] go study."

[Holy Spirit]