

**2-4-6-8, With Whom Do We Co-create?
Sermon by Fred Joblin, May 18, 2008
St. Paul's United Church, Orillia**

Genesis 1:1—2:4a and Matthew 28:16-20

In the beginning of the movie *Hook*, about the adult Peter Pan, Peter's 12-year-old son Jack is the last batter for his Blue Jays team, the last hope for his team to win. He strikes out, the home crowd sighs in disappointment, and Jack walks away, humiliated. Meanwhile the winning team gathers to give the famous cheer: "2-4-6-8, who do we appreciate? Blue Jays! Blue Jays! Yay, blue Jays!" That sportsmanlike gesture is small comfort for the losers.

Competitive sports have their place when played well, played fairly, and played primarily for fun. Shiny hockey is a good example where players play their best, but there are no referees, no score is kept, and everyone has a fun time. But serious competition means exclusion: for everyone who makes the roster, many others don't; for every player who gets the awards and rewards, others don't; and for everyone who wins, there are many more who lose.

It's the same elsewhere in our competitive world: for every lottery winner, there are countless losers; for every Survivor, American Idol, academy award, and beauty pageant winner, all others go home losers.

When our son Ted was young, he played hockey, and he enjoyed it as long as the teams played all the kids with equal time, for the fun of playing and the learning of the game. As soon as it became more competitive and physical contact was allowed and encouraged, he didn't enjoy it as much, and he gravitated to gymnastics, where the emphasis was on teamwork to create team displays. Later, he developed a passion for juggling, which continues to this day, and again the greatest joy he gets is working together with his juggling club to present shows together. In March, for the last three years, the juggling and physical arts club he belongs to in Nashville has presented Juggleville, a family-oriented 2-hour show, and he has been part of the creating, planning, organizing, and performing of the show.

His experience is to me a model of the kind of co-creation we need more of in this world, where there are no losers: only winners. Anyone who has been part of a collaborative effort, whether it's a musical, a drama, a cantata, a social services project, a worship service, a nature preservation project, a quilting bee, or a service club, knows of the challenges and ultimate joys of creating something important and wonderful together. I remember when I was teaching grade 2 and 3 back in the late 70s, when cooperative games became popular. I ran three years of Physical Education classes with only cooperative games being played. And what fun I remember the kids and me having!

That was also the time that Shel Silverstein's book of child-friendly poetry, *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, was highly popular—I hope it still is! One of my favourite poems, *Hug o' War*, expressed perfectly the joy of cooperation:

*I will not play at tug o' war.
I'd rather play at hug o' war,
Where everyone hugs instead of tugs,
Where everyone giggles
And rolls on the rug,
Where everyone kisses,
And everyone grins,
And everyone cuddles,
And everyone wins.*

The World Peace event that took place here at St. Paul's last Tuesday is an example of the kind of cooperation we desperately need today. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Community of Newmarket joined with us and Rama Mnjikaning to present an interfaith symposium that emphasized learning from each other and living in the spirit of peace, tolerance, love and understanding among followers of different faiths. What a wonderful evening it was, with a speaker from each tradition speaking about peace, including Karen giving the Christian perspective, followed by questions and a time of fellowship. The feeling we had was that this was just the beginning, and we look forward to future gatherings and opportunities to work together for peace.

For despite the horror stories that abound today with military regimes, profit mongering, political posturing, environmental degradation, etc., there is a ground swelling of people all over the world who have had enough of these things, who realize it's now or never to create a planet of justice, sustainability, and freedom. Anyone who passively hopes for change or holds onto old ways of doing things in business, politics, and religion, will eventually have to give way to those with a passion for peace, like the Muslims we met on Tuesday, the Craig Kielbergers of the world, and the wise aboriginal elders who still hold the knowledge of the land and what is needed to heal it.

There is a new feeling of co-creativity here, of recognizing our mutual responsibility as people of the earth, whatever our faith may be, to work together at last, to see beyond the illusion of separateness, to grasp a bigger sense of things than our own small, limited perspective. This is what John Spong describes as the real meaning behind the Matthew commissioning of the disciples—it's not a directive to convert people to Christianity, as the passage has been used for centuries to mean—but rather, as he puts it, “to go beyond the boundaries of their nation, their tribe and most specifically their religion.”

The disciples would have had a “henotheistic” image of God, meaning that the Hebrews claimed loyalty to their God, believing that each ethnic group had its own supreme God. This image emerged from their monarchy, which was one monarchy among many, and from this they developed images of God as lord, saviour, and almighty—images transferred to Jesus by some of his followers. Jesus is transforming this limited henotheistic concept into a broader one, into monotheism, where there is only one God, one creative force, one family of God—meaning everyone everywhere.

Spong goes on to say, “When they [the disciples] would finally escape all of these boundaries inside their expanded and open humanity, they were to proclaim the gospel—that is, the infinite love of God for all that God has made, a love that recognizes no barriers. Boundless love... includes every species, every plant, every planet, every tribe, every person. All become God's chosen. No one is alien. No one is separate from God. We live in God; God lives in us.”

This viewpoint also requires a perception of God, not as some external supernatural being who created everything and gave it to us to subdue and control, but rather as the life force that is in everything, an indwelling presence, the power that is within all of life that we experience as love and that calls us to respond with love.

Belief in an external God leads to all kinds of problematic questions, like why could an all-powerful God let people suffer and die in cyclones, earthquakes, holocausts, accidents, and illnesses? That image one that sets God up as a being who rewards and punishes, who doesn't listen to all of our prayers, and who can't be very powerful after all. This image of God is the one atheists rightfully reject and that Albert Einstein appears to reject in his recently discovered letter to a friend, in which he says that belief in God is "childish superstition" and "the word God is for me nothing more than the expression and product of human weakness."

Just as Jesus' followers needed to expand their limited image of God and go beyond their boundaries, so too, do we. If we are to be co-creators with God and with others, we need to go beyond boundaries of belief or dogma we've inherited and celebrate that the spirit moves within all spiritual traditions and people everywhere—indeed everywhere in the universe. We need to go beyond any judgements we may have, despite our best intentions, toward people we don't like, or who treat us poorly, or who don't measure up to our expectations. We need to go beyond any feelings of separateness from one another and from creation. We need to go beyond the superstition of an "out-there" God, and instead partner as adults with the God that is within us and within all of creation.

Letting go of these boundaries means letting go of anxiety and fear, allowing the spirit to move within us as it did with the disciples who became excited to share and live the good news of God's love for all.

We experience it in so many ways around here. A look through the Life and Work insert in the bulletin, and in the yellow folders in the Narthex/lobby, gives a quick sense of the myriad examples of co-creativity in worship, choirs, small groups, mission and service projects, social services, and various community groups that meet in the church.

Let's look at some additional ways to co-create, perhaps ones that need lifting up more frequently. One is to seek out people we don't know, or don't know very well, and make a point of talking with them and getting to know them. Another way is to make a point of wearing our name tags, or getting one made, so new people, and people who are embarrassed to ask—like me—can easily learn or remember our names. This will be especially important next week for "Bring-a-Friend-to-Church Sunday," which is another opportunity to invite people you know to share in the warmth and welcome of our St. Paul's community.

Another way is in this very situation, of me preaching, and you doing, thinking, feeling whatever it is you're doing, thinking, or feeling. Maybe I wouldn't want to know (!). Actually, I *would* want to know, but the situation isn't conducive to finding out right now. You can tell me later if you wish. The question is, even in a situation like this where I'm speaking and you're listening, what would it look like for us to be co-creating in this moment? I suggest it means that we're speaking and listening for something beyond the words, something that is of the spirit, something that strikes a chord within our hearts, something that offers an insight, shifts our awareness, catches our attention, or draws us closer together and to God.

The way I put it to my students in the classes I teach is this: it doesn't matter if you like me or not, or the course, or the texts, or the people in the course, or the things I say, or the way I mark your papers. What matters is that we use this situation as an opportunity to learn together, to connect our learning with our living, to work toward our goals, and to become more like the people we want to be. With that as the focus, a whole lot more than taking in and giving back information will happen.

The analogy can be applied to our work together here at St. Paul's, for it's not about personalities and like and dislikes; it's about our purpose in being here. It's about fulfilling our mission to be "an inclusive, energized, and life-giving community which actively witnesses Jesus' message of love for all."

This mission is what brings us together to meet, worship, laugh, sing, eat, play, share, and give all that we can. It's what calls us to look beyond the boundaries of St. Paul's and Orillia to include everyone in our global family. It's what enables us to think of ourselves not just as Canadians, but as citizens of Planet Earth. It's what enables us to think of ourselves as not just human beings, but as cosmic beings, connected to all things, connected to the spirit in all things.

The Genesis story emerged during the time that the Hebrew people were in exile in Babylon, and their captors insisted that *their* rulers and *their* god held all power. The creation story is not about how the world was scientifically created; it's an assertion of the power of God, from whom all things come to be. It's also about how God is in relationship with creation, and how we are in relationship with God and each other. And in Jewish tradition, creation is not something that just took place "in the beginning," but that is ongoing, with God entrusting us with the responsibility to be in a caring relationship with it and with each other.

The blessing of the Sabbath is a reminder, not literally to rest on Saturday or Sunday, but to reflect on God's goodness, to celebrate the grace of God, and to recall ourselves to our deeper purpose of co-creating the kind of world God and we truly want.

In the movie, *Hook*, Peter Pan grew up and became Peter Banning, a corporate pirate. His reawakening comes when he remembers what he co-created: his children. His spirit soars, and he remembers who he is: a spirit-person, full of love, and bursting to be with them and create a new life with them.

So let's do the same ourselves and become more fully co-creators with God and one another, and let's change our cheer so that it celebrates how we are all blessed and all called to work together to bring peace. Here we go:

*2-4-6-8, with whom do we co-create?
With God, with nature, with sister and with brother!
The young, the old, the shy, the bold: all are part of what unfolds.
So let's all hear it for the co-creative spirit!
Let's sing about it, shout about it, tell all the world about it!
And let's li-i-ive love!
Let's live love.
Let's live love....*

May it be so! Amen.