

**“GOOD CONNECTIONS, Part I”
Sermon by Karen Hilfman Millson
St. Paul’s United Church, Orillia
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“Choose Life”
“Be Still and Know that I am God”
God speaks to us saying..
I am doing a new thing – can you not see it?
And Jesus says to us across the centuries:
that we will do even greater things than he did
as we evolve connected to the power of the Spirit
for that is what we are called to:
as Jesus said
“I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly”.

But like the early Christians
we continue to struggle to develop community
that is life-giving to all
we struggle to develop community
that doesn’t get distorted by the negative
or self serving stories we tell ourselves.

We see evidence of that lack of wholeness all around us –
in the stories on the news of war and violence,
hunger and disease for which there is no cure
and oil rigs gushing forth oil into the Gulf >
and we see that lack of wholeness
in the midst of the realities and moments of our everyday lives.

This morning – on Christian Family Sunday
I’d like to look for a few moments at how the stories
we tell ourselves impact our lives >
and how we have choices about the stories we tell
and the angle we tell them from.

- we can choose whether or not we will keep telling negative stories,
for example,
about ourselves or about someone else
- or whether we are willing to see life from a different perspective –
a wider perspective ...
from the perspective of the eyes of love
that recognizes goodness
but also recognizes that which is absent of goodness.

When we can crack open a negative story
that keeps us in bondage
and see it from a new perspective

it may have the power to change how we experience life.

- a new story, a new perspective
- letting go of giving power to a negative story can set our power free from the bondage of limiting stories.

This is a huge topic
and needs a series of sermons and small groups
to explore it but we can at least begin.

In the Small Group that gathers on Tuesday mornings
here at St. Paul's called "Recipe for Joy" –
we were reflecting on the power of the stories we tell ourselves.

The author of the book
Martha Beck suggests that
"most of [our] pain comes not from reality,
but from [our] stories about reality."

We can choose which stories
we allow to inform our perception about life.
The stories most closely connected to the truth
set us free to live fully she suggests.

The truth, even the hard truth,
is something our core self can deal with.
The author concludes the story saying
"Believing lies causes us to suffer immeasurable."

The author goes on and suggests
that one way to approach our stories
that don't feel like they are based on a foundation of truth –
is to try changing the story by stating the opposite >
then checking it out to see if it feels truer.
She personally did this when she injured her knee
shortly after starting an intensive exercise regime.

Her story of frustration was
"I'm furious because I want my knee to heal,
so that I can work out like I'm supposed to."
Then she reversed the story and it became
"I'm furious because my knee wants me to heal,
so that I can't work out – like I'm not supposed to."

She reflects that when she read that back to herself –
she laughed out loud
because she resonated with every part of the new story.
She realized she'd been hiding behind a wall of denial –
the fact was she was tired
and her new exercise program was too rigorous for her
and that she was damaging herself
by trying to exceed her physical limits.
(p41 &42 – "The Joy Diet")

Looking at the story
we are telling ourselves from a different perspective
it can be very helpful in moving us toward
honouring and claiming what will really be life-giving
and what will really lead to wholeness.

I've been doing a tele-seminar course about "Evolutionary Spirituality"
and while none of it seems to be particularly new to me –
it is helpful in how it is being presented
and in the opportunities to look again at key ideas
of our ever evolving spiritual family.

The key, central concept in the course –
is the invitation – to begin to practice seeing life
from a new perspective –
from the perspective of God –
the perspective of love –
of that which is eternal from the Evolutionary Impulse ...
- to step outside of the time and to see from a new angle.
- People on the course –
- which is 700 people from 30 countries around the world –
are reporting back amazing shifts happening in their lives –
shifts that I have seen people experience
and claim around here for the past 14 years.

When we can look at situations of life
and at the stories we tell ourselves about life
from a perspective of being outside of time –
from the eternal perspective of God –
which is the perspective of love –
we can begin to gently recognize
that our limited perspectives or our perspectives of being in bondage
because of wounds, can be shifted –
and we can see differently –
a new way of seeing that sets us free to evolve into the fullness
of our compassion creativity
and connectedness to the incredible power of love.

During the past month
I have been reflecting on my connection to my husband Alan's family
and how they slowly started to tell a new story –
that helped that new story emerge.

The story began when Alan was six
and his siblings ranged in age from 4-14.
There was a tragic accident on the family farm.
The family was playing tag upstairs in the barn
when Mom hit the cover on the hay chute just the wrong way
and fell through.
A week later she died from the injuries.

A year later Dad remarried.
When I came into the family 14 years later
there was lots of grief that had not been dealt with
and there was quite a story about the very difficult step-mom.

As the years went on and the 6 kids all moved away from home –
things started to shift –
a softening was happening –
but still the old story was held onto.
I started to make observations like:
“I think its amazing that any woman in her right mind
would take on you six kids and your Dad –
who though I love him dearly –
we all know is not easy to get along with.”
I observed out loud along with Alan
and others that although things were difficult in the years at home –
their step mom was a wonderful grandma –
and treated all the kids with a caring and love
that was quite remarkable.
Slowly a new story began to emerge
which recognized that things
couldn't have been easy for her
during those difficult years –
a part of the story that,
during those time, they couldn't see –
but now, from a new perspective they could.
And love emerged and grew
and impacted the connections of the family.

It can be helpful to look at the stories that inform
how we engage with the world >
to see if those stories drain us of energy
and leave us feeling like a victim,
or do they help us
and expand our capacity to love and care.
Looking at things from a new angle
can crack open stories that have muddled our lives,
filled us with fear or immobilized our potential –
some of the negatives need to be dealt with
like the residential school stories finally told –
we need to love the abused with love –
some of our interpretations just need to be seen differently.

In our Wednesday morning Learning Circle
the book we are currently exploring
Darwin, Divinity and The Dance of the Cosmos
by Bruce Sanguin
invited us to reflect upon the major story
that informs our perspective on life –
and that is the story of creation.

There is a new story that is emerging with great power
to shift our perspective on life –
a story, referred to by some as
The Universe Story –
which recognizes that all of creation
comes from the same source
and very importantly that creation
is continuously evolving
as science has been telling us for decades now –
and that means that we can continuously be evolving.
It is a story that goes back 13.7 billion years –
before there was anything –
until all of life explodes into everything –
to begin an evolution of development that continues today.

Such a story invites us to recognize
that we carry within us all the gifts of creation –
creativity, patience, wisdom and the power to evolve.
This story sees the beauty and the goodness
that is within us and all the world around us.

When we carry the perspective of a core story within us
as we have for centuries
in the Christian church that says we are inherently sinful
and therefore separated from God
and that we can only be redeemed by an external force –
we can end up living without the awareness of the incredible gift
and blessing we each are ...
and without the acknowledgement of the incredible gift
and blessing of creation all around us.
Along side the story of our sinful nature
that is women through the story of Adam and Eve and beyond –
there are other perspective that see us as being born in blessing –
filled with light and love and the potential to evolve –
like in the story that says that we are created in the image of God ...
and in the Celtic perspective that we are born as blessing –
a perspective that didn't receive enough votes
from the Bishops back in the early centuries of the Christian Church.
Augustine's concept that we are born in original sin
inherently separated from God >
in need of an outside force to redeem us
with the most votes in the Orthodox Church
and so that perspective,
that story has informed our understanding of ourselves for centuries.
Though now we are reclaiming the awareness
that we are born in blessing.
We need to reflect on the question –
how do we make connection to the good that is within us and creation –
how do we claim perspective on the stories
that inform our lives so that they help us to “choose life”

and to do ever more amazing things than Jesus did,
including living into the abundant life
that Jesus taught about and lived.

That question cannot be fully answered here this morning
or perhaps even fully answered in a life time –
but one key – a major key –
is to develop practices which includes meditation
that help you to live connected to your authentic self,
plus connected to the power and the perspective of God –
we need to make good connection to that power.

Think about how irritating, frustrating and unfulfilling it is
when a bulb does not have a good connection with a lamp
and it flickers and is undependable ...
or of a phone connection that is not a good connection –
we only get bits and pieces of the story that is being shared –
leaving us feeling unfilled and confused and frustration.
We need to create time and space in our lives
for good connection with ourselves,
with our God – with each others, with creation.
If you have a wall within you
or a negative story within you
that is prohibiting you from having a good connection with yourself or another –
check it out and see if you can see the story differently –
from God's perspective.
See if you can see the goodness,
or grow the goodness
or see if you need to detach from a story
so that you stop giving power to what is not good.

Where there is darkness within us,
Where there is negative talk that drags us down
or our family down, or our community down.
- it does not come from the source of life
- we need to fill those places with the power of light
- and love which we are capable of doing.

Nelson Mandela is often credited with the quote on our bulletin this morning
but he was actually quoting Marianne Williamson who says:
“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness that frightens us.”

Imagine...
what would happen in this world,
in this church, in our workplaces, in our homes –
if we really allowed our light
and our love to have full power in our lives.

Imagine ...
let us open ourselves to that possibility >
so that the old stories will no longer keep us in the bondage
but instead we'll find new stories
told from the perspective of eternal love –
stories that set us free to
(1) live boldly,
(2) love extravagantly and
(3) give of ourselves with abandonment
to help create a world of compassion,
wholeness and creativity that is constantly evolving
and creating wondrous connection.

May it be so,

Amen