

**Sermon May 10, 2020, Mother's Day Online Worship
"A Festival of Coming Home"**

Proverbs 8:22-36 John 19:25b-27

Rev. Karin Kilpatric

Today is Mother's Day—not a religious holiday but an important one. And despite its commercialization and often sentimentalized expression, almost all of us still instinctively feel the rightness of a day designated to honor motherhood. The United Church of Christ, our denomination, calls it the "Festival of the Christian Home." I have heard it said that a festival is nothing more than a party if the celebration doesn't in some way connect us all to the Divine dimensions of our lives. Surely motherhood, which generates life and nurtures it, which loves with a love that readily and naturally puts the welfare of her children before herself, for whom no sacrifice is ever too great to bear, who loves unconditionally, accepting her child's "lanyard" or colorful picture as a great treasure and truly believing it is—surely this mothering love shines with a blessed light into this world. Calling Mother's Day a "festival" seems well deserved. In the UCC's Festival of the Christian Home, we recognize both mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers who create a place of nurture and support for the raising of children—who establish a place called home.

Today, in honor of this festival, I have chosen a scripture reading from the book of Proverbs. Here we encounter the ancient wisdom of God imaged as Sophia. Sophia speaks to us from the pages of scripture, "The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. When he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, I was beside him, like a master worker, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race." What an inspiring ancient image—The Creator in partnership with Wisdom, together, delighting in this creation, delighting in the human race.

Sophia, the Greek word for wisdom, is found in the words "philosophy"—the love of wisdom, and "theosophy"—the wisdom of God. Here, in this passage, Sophia is seen as the hidden unity behind the whole plan of creation—the ancient wisdom that holds the created order, together. Wisdom dances with God, working and playing in the world, celebrating humanity. In this sense, she is a hearth and home of all that is or can be. She reminds us of the inner quality of things that we must turn inward to see. The voice of Wisdom as she speaks in Proverbs has been described as the World Soul. But this world soul, this primordial home, must be sought by each of us. Sophia exists in the design of creation— a treasured part of this design. And, like all treasures, she is hidden. Wisdom is always present, but only the eyes of love permit one the vision to see her. In the course of our individual lives; through our experiences of loving, through the power of our memory and through the creativity of our imagination we are privileged to catch glimpses. These experiences open the eyes of our souls wide enough for us to see God's being within the material world around us and within the being of another. Even more important, loving, remembering, and imagining allow us to peek around the obstacle of our own dominating ego into the self that we really are.

Let's take a closer look at the word, "remember." It is the combination of the prefix "re" which means back or again, as in return (turn back again) and the word "member." So, to re-member is to bring back the members again—to bring back to mind the specific qualities of certain beloved characters or events or places or

feelings. To host a kind of “reunion” of the soul. To remember is to imaginatively sense the limbs, organs, and blood of these feelings and thoughts and to make them come alive again. When we re-member, we feel a sudden vitality within, which now inhabits our minds and hearts. For a brief moment, the past lives again. To remember is a creative act—an act of reverencing or giving respect—an act which has the power to deeply affect the one who remembers. The word, “religion” itself means to tie back. To practice religion means to strive to return home to the Divine source.

Dick Lundquist called me this week after reading my sermon on the 23rd Psalm. Dick has many memories and stories that ground his life. This was one you may have heard, but that’s alright. He spent several decades on the Arvada Police Force. One night he was called to a terrible accident. An elderly black woman was pinned into her car. While waiting for medical help, Dick crawled in the car to investigate. She said to him, “I am cold and he gave her his coat, then as they waited, she asked, “Would you hold my hand, and then would you pray with me?” Dick started reciting the 23rd Psalm and she joined in with him and then died in his arms. Dick was reassured there was nothing that could have been done to save her life as a broken rib had lacerated her internally. A couple of days later he was called down to the station office and wondered, “Oh Gosh, what is wrong now.” In the office, two younger women waited for him, a mother and daughter. They said, “We just came to thank you. We are so grateful to you that our mother did not have to die alone.” He asked, “How did you know?” and they said that their neighbor had come by the car and looked in while this event took place and had told them about it. The women started crying, and Dick found himself moved to tears as well. In this time of racial tension and injustice this memory speaks of another way.

When for some reason, the pace of life slows momentarily (like the time in which we have been living for the past two months), we often experience a strange sense of longing, and a desire to return to the source of our lives. We can be overcome with what seems to be a profound feeling of nostalgia or, one could say, “homesickness.”

Who among us has never felt homesick—has never felt a poignant absence and a painful longing to return home to loved ones, to familiar turf, to remembered customs, sights, sounds, and even scents. Many of us now separated from friends and family, behind windows and masks yearn for the freedom to connect deeply with others as we remember. Refugees from war torn lands or from political or religious persecution, yearn for the land of their birth. Many seniors, now quarantined in nursing homes, feel a terrible loneliness in this vacuum of contact with those they love. Folks whose families of origin have passed on, those whose hallowed homes have been demolished to build highways or parking lots, divorced couples whose households have had to be dissolved and the children of these couples who travel back and forth between them, all feel a sense of emptiness-- a loss of home’s taken-for-granted-ness.

This deep longing for home frequently appears in our dreams. Recently a woman told me of a dream in which she found herself traveling away from the house of her grandfather, an important figure in her life, and then, confused about where she was or how she got there, desperately trying to contact him and to get back home again.

Homesickness is not a childish weakness. It does not suggest immaturity on our part. This awakening of the lamenting heart is the soul’s reminder of our need to return, again and again, to refuel, to reconnect, or to

rediscover. Our souls seek a place to belong. We may indeed be longing for a literal country or town or house or person, but in these profound waves of homesickness, which often come out of the blue, there is also a spiritual desire to feel the unity of all life and the trusted place of our lives within it—to escape from the rootlessness and aimlessness of the world in which we often live. There is a desire to live within the circle that God drew on the face of the deep when this world was created and here to feel at home.

When we are awakened to a wisdom that exists within us and around us, perhaps by the knock of homesickness, the spark of memory, the dream of the imagination, we remember that having been born into Sophia's unity we can take delight in our own revelations—These revelations are our unique and individual expressions of her wisdom. In our homesickness we become aware that we are not homeless. Disoriented? Perhaps. Lost? Maybe. A long journey away? Sometimes. But, our souls tell us that we are never homeless--our faith tells us that we are never without a home to which we can and will return.

The Festival of the Christian Home reminds us that what is needed in modern life is a “sense of home”—an image or memory which provides stability--which gives us a home base—that lets us move out to embrace the adventures and challenges of our lives while feeling secure at our core-- which holds us together, no matter how far away we roam. This might be found in memories of a loving home or church—a place where we are known and welcomed, the presence of close neighbors, of a faithful partner, the inspiration of a devoted teacher, the touch of intimate healing. Our home base might also be summoned in the practice of prayer, the attention to our dreams, or in our calling to compassionate service to society. Carl Sandburg communicated a sensory image of a comforting memory in his short poem, “Home.”

Here is the thing my heart wishes the world had more
of: I heard it in the air of one night when I listened To a
mother singing softly to a child, restless And angry in
the darkness

When we see, or hear, through the love, imagination and remembrances of the heart, we are no longer alienated or isolated in our individuality. We feel a unity that is our birthright. We walk into the circle that God drew and continues to draw on the face of the deep. Our soul wants intimacy and yearns for Sophia's wisdom. In closing, listen again to the rest of her words. “And now, my children, listen to me; Happy are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. Happy is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.

The way to wisdom is patience and trust in life, beginning with your own individual experience of it. The way to wisdom is to love and imagine and remember, to delight in the joys of the earth and yet to suffer it's sadness, to be courageous toward the future but to be steadfast to what you have known and loved, to let go when you need to and to tie back “religio” when you can, to patiently and expectantly stand in waiting at Wisdom's gates: listening, learning, and knowing that you are home.