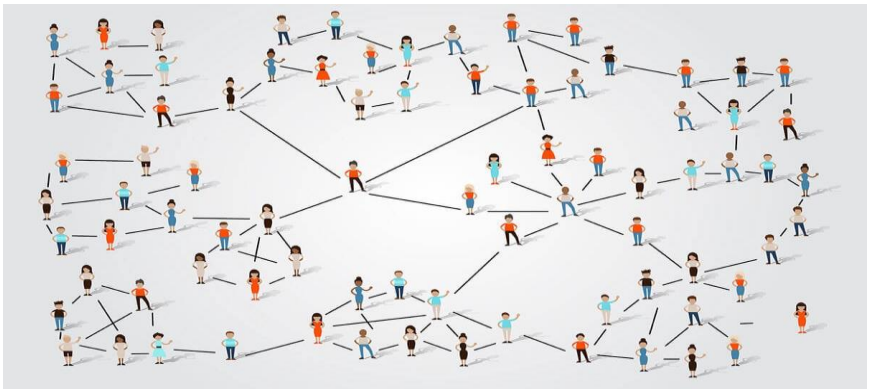
Sermon: Connected Apart October 4 2020 John 17:20-25 World Communion Sunday

Rev.Steve Clifton - Rideau Park United Church - Ottawa ON

We are sisters and brothers in Christ. Family. We are gathering today in separate places, joined together through digital technology. But wherever we are today we are family to one another. Really.

Geneticists tell us that we are all of us related. No matter our place of origin, our race, gender or ethnicity, all of us are at least 50th cousins.

Another way of thinking about this is that we all have common ancestors. Somewhere in the past our family trees intertwine. If our families are from the same country of origin, share the same ethnicity, we would share a common relative somewhere in the last 10 generations. For others the connection may be more distant but geneticists can find we all have a common genetic ancestor somewhere in the last 2300 years. So we are all family. Related. Connected.



You may have heard of the game Six degrees of Kevin Bacon? It's a game created by some college students who noticed that the character actor Kevin Bacon was in a lot of movies. In the game you are to try to link other movie actors to Mr. Bacon by association. And you are to do it in 6 moves or less.

So for instance, the actor Matt Damon was in *Saving Private Ryan* with Tom Hanks. Tom Hanks was in *Apollo 13* with Kevin Bacon. So Matt Damon is 2 degrees separate from Kevin Bacon. This game is based on the idea that any two people are separated by at most 6 acquaintances; we are all a friend of a friend of a friend…we all are connected to one another, more closely than we know.

But do we feel connected? Do we feel a part of a big connected family? Or do we feel separated from others and alone in the world?

In the best of times we might feel apart. Irish author Peter Rollins suggests that we, all of us, feel separated, apart, cast adrift from something greater.

He writes of how every infant experiences 2 births. The first birth is our entry into the world. The second birth is the birth of self-awareness. Somewhere around the 6 month to 18 month mark an infant starts to identify as existing in separation from her surroundings, begins to see herself as an individual. And when we begin to understand ourselves to be individuals, we are marked with a sense of separation.

My nephew as a toddler said to his Mom "I hate you Mommy, is that okay?" He was separating, reluctantly, as toddlers do.

Rollins writes that this separation is hard and we feel this loss, for the rest of our lives… and we try over our lives, in so many ways to find what we have lost, to fill the gap, to be connected once again. Separated from God, Creation and one another we feel we are lost. *

And in this covid time, we feel apart. We are apart. We may meet on zoom. We meet in our bubble. But we keep our distance.

It is hard to be apart …from family and friends and community for months at a time.

Some among us are quite isolated and that is very hard.

In Genesis, when the first human is made God says it is not good for the human one to be alone. We are meant to be in community. In relationship. This time of separation is hard.

It is also true that even covid reminds us of our connectedness. The virus reminds us that we part of a global community. We share the virus` consequences globally.

When a vaccine becomes available, some nations may want to hoard it for their own citizens, but science reminds us that we must share vaccines and the immunity they give with everyone for covid to gone everywhere.

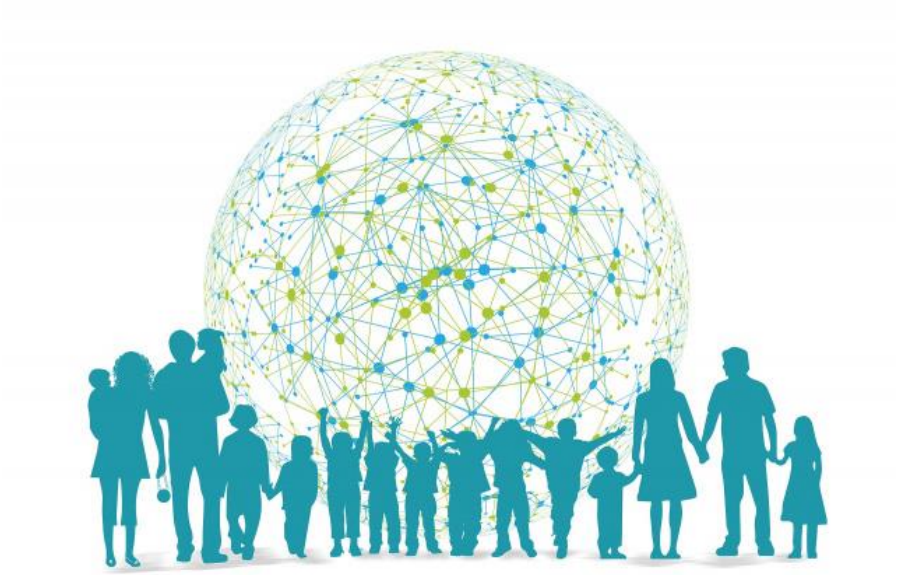
Covid keeps us apart.

And even our being apart is connecting. We keep apart for others as much as for ourselves. We wear masks for others, to keep the virus from spreading. It's our care for each other, our awareness of connectedness that keeps us apart.

Our mystics share experiences of the connectedness of all things. They glimpse the unity of all that God has made. In 1958, while on a walk in Louisville KY, the monk and mystic Thomas Merton wrote this*:*

Yesterday, in Louisville, at the corner of 4th and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers….There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun."

If we feel alone, apart, disconnected, if as Peter Rollins suggests, we long to reclaim a sense of connectedness now lost, can we hear Jesus prayer that we might see the oneness, the connectedness of everyone and everything. We are one body. We are connected, even when we are apart.



A feeling of connectedness has huge implications for how we treat each other. In his book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* Harvard psychologist and Canadian Steven Pinker argues that humanity is becoming less violent and more humane. One of the reasons that he lists for this change is the human rights movement. When people of other race, language, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, abilities, faiths…are seen as human beings, equal before the law…when divisions are erased we treat each other more kindly, more gently. When we are connected, good things result.

And we are connected in another way. Science tells us that all the atoms in our bodies are completely renewed every five years. The atoms that made up you five years ago have moved on to be in someone else. There are so many atoms in each of us, so many billions and billions of atoms that each of us may have atoms in us that were once a part of everyone who ever lived. There are atoms from Moses and Miriam in you, atoms from John the beloved disciple and from Mary Magdalene in you, atoms from your grandfather and grandmother…we are all connected in so many ways even through distance and time.

Today we share communion. We are separated, in our own homes, but connected One Bread, One Cup, One Saviour.

As we come to the table today wherever we are… we can reflect on our connectedness, and as we are reminded on this world communion Sunday, our connections are deep and wide.

Amen