

Sermon Outline - Sun, August 7, 2022
New Roots in Nature | Genesis 1 & Genesis 2

Keyword Summary: Nature, Relationship, Creation,

Overview: Today is our first week of New Roots in Nature and Kids Church Sunday. This month we will be meeting outdoors for Sunday Service around the Boston area and online via Zoom. We will be looking at the natural world as a sacred text, looking for how God shows up and speaks all around us!

Grounding at Tenean Beach

- We are standing at Tenean Beach - which is where the Neponset River meets the ocean. This area is rich with wildlife and is really important to the ecosystem of this area. The Neponset River has a really history that says a lot about how we as humans have interacted with the natural world for a long long time.
- The Neponset River was first recorded in history in 1619. The indigenous peoples of Massachusetts lived here and tended to this land farrrrrr before any of these big buildings were built - this river, and rivers in general, are sacred places - food sources, crucial elements of the ecosystem, natural boundaries of place and space.
- English settlers landed on the shore of Massachusetts - they brought with them disease, violence, a desire for power, a need for expansion and growth and a really different perspective on how we as humans should relate to the land, including this river.
- Over time, the Neponset River was used for industry - to power mills and factories to create gunpowder, paper, chocolate, and more! Now, this river is so polluted from industrial waste that In 2021, the EPA recommended 3.7 miles of the Lower Neponset River be added to the National Priorities List of the Superfund program, due to industrial pollution with PCBs - which are toxic manmade chemicals that affect our environment and our overall health. These pollutants can travel by water, air, and migratory species (like birds) for long distances.

Exegesis

- Today we are going to look at the very first two chapters of the Bible - Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. These chapters are often referred to as the two counts of Creation.
- With the ease of God's own breath, God creates the sky, the waters, the land, the sun, the moon, the stars, the birds, the fish, the animals, the humans. And God blessed it all and said it was **GOOD!**
- In Genesis 2, the rivers, the animals, the plants - are all in important relationship to one another. God even creates another person, to be in relationship with Adam - to be in partnership with and collaboration with.
- Both of these stories can reveal how God has a wide perspective on how each element of creation has potential to interact with one another. And humans are not meant to control or dominate any other aspect of creation, but are meant to be in close relationship with.

Symbiotic Mutualistic Relationships in Nature

Close relationships in nature are called symbiotic relationships. There are different types of symbiotic relationships.

1. Mutualistic - both or all species benefit from the relationship
2. Commensalism - One species benefits and the other is unaffected
3. Parasitism - One species benefits and the other is harmed
4. Competition - No one benefits

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- In the case of the Neponset River, and its history of industrial pollution by humans, we might fall in the parasitic category, where our actions over time have caused great harm to this river, to all of the species that call this river home, and to one another - as we too live near and depend on this river source.
- The Creation stories in Genesis, and the intricate connections between species reveal God's deep desire for mutualism - the type of relationship where our individual and collective encounters with one another and with other beings benefit the health, wellbeing, and flourishing of all.

We can look to specific relationships that exist in the natural world to learn a little bit more about what a mutualistic relationship might look like:

1. The bee and the flower. Bees fly from flower to flower gathering nectar, which they make into food, benefiting the bees. When they land in a flower, the bees get some pollen on their hairy bodies, and when they land in the next flower, some of the pollen from the first one rubs off, pollinating* the plant. This benefits the plants. In this mutualistic relationship, the bees get to eat, and the flowering plants get to reproduce.
2. The spider crab and the algae. Spider crabs live in shallow areas of the ocean floor, and greenish-brown algae lives on the crabs' backs, making the crabs blend in with their environment, and unnoticeable to predators. The algae gets a good place to live, and the crab gets camouflage.
3. The bacteria and the human. A certain kind of bacteria lives in the intestines of humans and many other animals. The human cannot digest all of the food that it eats. The bacteria eat the food that the human cannot digest and partially digest it, allowing the human to finish the job. The bacteria benefit by getting food, and the human benefits by being able to digest the food it eats.

There are many examples in the natural world of mutualistic symbiotic relationships - relationships that respect the needs of multiple species.

Humans interact with hundreds, maybe even thousands, of different species each day. As we move through this month of New Roots in Nature, may we take some time to reflect...

1. What symbiotic relationships exist in my day to day life? Do these relationships tend to be mutualistic, parasitic, commensalistic? What people, plants, and animals do I interact with on a daily/weekly basis?
2. How can I shift into a posture of mutualistic relationships with all human and non-human beings in my life? What patterns do I need to shift? What practices can I cultivate?
3. What is my relationship to Biblical stories of Creation? What are the implications of the narratives I have been taught/told? Where is liberation possible with a re-imagined interpretation and experience of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2?