Plymouth
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

RESPONDING FAITHFULLY TO SACRED UNION

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Sermon 2 of 3 on stewardship, related to Genesis 1:26-28

CENTRAL FOCUS:

That a living faith in the wholeness (Sacred Union) of Creation and the Soul leads to life giving relationships of respect and reciprocity.

The Message version:
God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature
So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,
the birds in the air, the cattle,
And, yes, Earth itself,
and every animal that moves on the face of Earth."
God created human beings;
God created them godlike,
Reflecting God's nature.
God created them male and female.
God blessed them:
"Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge!
Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air,
for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth."

These are the words of our ancient tradition.
May the Living Word of God in Scripture be alive within us, among us, and beyond us.

This morning we continue with the series on responding faithfully. I want to let you know first that I will be mentioning stories of sexual assault later in this message. I mention it now to offer an opportunity for anyone who needs to take care of themselves around that kind of story.

It's also important in the beginning of this message to clarify some things in the sacred reading from Genesis. Particularly, I want to reference the part of creating human beings. In this version of the story from the Message version of the Bible, the English comes out as "God created them male and female." I want to be clear that this does not imply that God created them male OR female as a binary about gender categories and fixed gender roles. In fact, it's important that we really lean into the "and" of this story that we are all created male *and* female. As we know from history and biology and psychology, we are all a mix of what it is to be in the human spectrum.

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Please note: *This is an unedited preaching script.*

And that helps me get to the theme for this message today: sacred union. By that I do not mean simply a relationship between two people, let alone just a man and a woman. What I mean is sacred union in the mythic and energetic sense—that of the coming together of opposites, the integration of opposites. There is from a wisdom and mythic standpoint a sacred union of sun and moon, of heaven and earth, or, from a more eastern source, of yin and yang energy. It is that wholeness, that sacred union coming together, which allows access to our deepest wisdom and empowers our most faithful and generative response to life whether that be from a person, a relationship, a group, or even a whole culture.

In the West, there is a sacred union language of masculine and feminine energies. This once again is not about an "OR" nor is it fixed on sex or gender expression. It is talking about seemingly opposing energies that, when coming together, create a whole, a sacred union. Over simplified, feminine or yin energy can be associated with the right brain and masculine or yang energy with the left brain. The yin or feminine archetypal energy has to do with the power and wisdom of going inward, of receiving and flowing, of intuition and experiential knowing, of seeing the whole and its organic connection. The yang or masculine energy has to do with the power of linear thought and action, of directing and delineating, of goal setting and ordering. While there may be trends associating men more with the masculine archetypal energies and women more with the feminine archetypal energies, this is far from any rule or determinative factor. We all have some amount of both and we individually vary. Moreover, both individually and culturally we need both to respond faithfully to life.

When we don't have the sacred union of these energies, we get suffering and injustice for the people and the earth. We get bad religion and act in bad faith.

In our sacred reading this morning is an illustration of what happens when masculine energy is not integrated with the feminine and therefore becomes distorted. Many have thought that the English translation where God gives dominion to human beings over the earth (in this translation it says "Take charge") was permission for what I would call domination of the earth, for treating earth like an object to be used and consumed. Rabbi Ellen Bernstein is an eco-theologian who cares a lot about this passage. Bernstein also was told that Genesis 1 was harmful to the environment, but changed her mind after study of the context and original language of Genesis.

She realized that dominion did not mean domination.
Says Bernstein,
"The understanding of dominion as domination (as critics suggest) assumes that we humans stand over and above the whole creation, entirely separate from her. And yet we could not be more intimately related. The very goodness—the ultimate goodness—proclaimed on the sixth day, after the entire creation has been completed, alludes to all the creatures together—the web of life—and not just compartmentalized humanity as many moderns surmise.[6] Since we are all born of the One, we are kin to the earth and its creatures."

It is an incomplete and immature masculine energy and perspective, unintegrated with the feminine, that encourages the bad faith interpretation of dominion as domination and separation from and objectification of the earth. Long after native wisdom keepers understood it, Western science now recognizes that we can only truly understand things in relationship, in the context of the whole. Holding that whole, interdependent perspective is a feminine energy that all humans can value and express. Without the sacred union of masculine and feminine energies, we cannot respond faithfully to the earth.

The profound and painful lack of integration of the feminine turns the masculine toxic and abusive. Some of you may have read of the recent re-litigation of those involved in a fraternity party a couple years ago at Cornell University. A young woman who was heavily intoxicated became subject to the will of seven young men of that fraternity who more or less turned her into an object, an advertised vending machine for their sexual pleasure.

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Of course, this harmful distortion is not limited to lost young men.

A few months back a story appeared about a network of husbands who shared online their experiences and techniques in drugging their own wives into an unconscious state for the same purpose of their own sexual pleasure, their own sexual assault. Some of them posted videos of their actions and some even charged a fee for others to watch.

Both of these stories represent a shocking disrespect of women and the feminine. Particularly telling about the group of husbands, whose network numbered in the thousands, is that they were on a now shutdown website called motherless.com which had millions of visits per month.

What could be a clearer indication of the loss of connection to the feminine than an oft visited website called motherless.com?

This loss of connection to the feminine and distortion of the masculine leads not only to ignorance of, but active disrespect for the feminine, often expressed as disrespect for women and for the earth which is considered an embodiment of the feminine in the mythic world. Profound disrespect for the feminine, for women, and for the earth is what we currently see in the White House and in those associated with it. This is how we get patriarchy and empire. Without the sacred union of masculine and feminine energies, we cannot respond faithfully to each other.

Perhaps your response to these stories is anger, perhaps it is broken heartedness. That is understandable. I feel angry and broken hearted. It seems to me that given our faith there is a place for both as long as that anger is like a fire that fuels a creative response beyond finger pointing and condemnation, but to calling back in the lost. This may still include applying the full extent of the law, but this is not the same as closing our hearts to these lost souls.

There is a faithful way in which we keep our own freedom of the soul and power of the heart if we remember that the profoundness of the Greater Love of God that I spoke of last week includes not only profound heartbreak for the vulnerable ones who suffer at the hands of these offending actors, but includes also heartbreak for the offenders who are so lost that they have lost touch with the sacred sense of the feminine, the Divine Mother, the earth mother.

Let it be said clearly: Our faith in its healthy expression, and the healthy forms of other faith traditions, stand in complete contrast and resistance to this kind of disrespect of and disconnection from the feminine. Our faith is rooted in the Creator who created a world of sacred union, of interdependent balance, a life-giving cosmos where ultimately there is a union and creative, life-giving integration of opposites; sun and moon, light and dark, heaven and earth, male and female. If we trust this Creator, have faith in this Creating Mystery, and are trusting in that vision of sacred union, then we are called to respond faithfully to seek and support sacred union, within us, among us, and beyond us. That means our faithful response is to journey towards sacred union in ourselves and in our society. We are called, at this point in our cultural moment, to uplift the feminine and heal the toxic masculine. Often this will mean uplifting feminine energies and uplifting women. And yet it also means seeing to the nurturance and the healing of what has become so toxic in the expression of the masculine.

I want to go back to the words of Rabbi Ellen Bernstein.
“Since we are all born of the One.”

There is a oneness inherent in the Divine, a sacred union. And as the ancient story says, we are created in the likeness of the Creator God, the wholeness of the Divine Mystery. Certainly, we each lose that wholeness somewhere early along the way and certainly our culture can and has lost it. Yet, it is still deep within us, and we are called to return to sacred union, to unite head and heart, mercy and justice, individual

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freedom and collective responsibility, aspiration and humility, contemplation and action. It is that wholeness, that coming together, which accesses the blessing of our deepest wisdom, our most faithful and generative response to life.

"Since we are all born of the One."
May it be so. AMEN.

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