

## Connected at the Source

Mark 5:21-46

May 14, 2017

“Where’s your button?” Mom is egging on her 2-year-old who is discovering and learning names for his body parts. “Show me your button”! He lifts up his shirt giggling and point to his belly button. The next thing I know I’m showing the 2 year old *my* belly button and giggling right along with him.

What is it about belly buttons?

Hang on to that question.

Earlier the week of the belly button showing I had been with my Spiritual Director. We begin with 5 minutes of silence, then Larry asks

me, “What is on your heart?” On this particular week I responded immediately that the word “fragmentation” was on my heart. During that silence I had been unable to let go of all the spinning in my mind. Besides the usual preaching and teaching and visiting and related ministry work, on my heart were visions of a new member’s class, and an upcoming Session retreat for which I was planning dancing in my head. Another stream of consciousness was focused on staff resignations and searches. Then there were the news reports I’d been hearing on the car radio out of Washington. Then there were the energy and hopes for the Pittsburgh Penguins in the NHL play-offs keeping up too many nights, too late. And then the exasperation of a dog to train and I was anticipating a visit from my sister (who doesn’t like dogs). It felt like a game of hopscotch... from pastor to mentor to preacher, to sister to wife to citizen to sports-fan to pet-owner. I judge none of these bad. Or unusual—just life. — but for some reason I hadn’t been able to collect myself. My mind, my soul, my gut were

each in pieces... fragmented from wholeness, disconnected from my center.

Have you been there? Hopscotching from one thing to another? Those of you with children at home know this especially profoundly.

Mothers and Fathers are confronted with the sheer delight but hectic realities brought with newborns, or restless tweens, or rebellious teens, or still at home twenty somethings who you long to have launched on their own.

There are times we sail through the excitement and associated complexity of life and with a tired yet satisfied sigh, turn off the light, and get a refreshing night's sleep and... and there are the times we fret.

Belly-buttons.

Maybe we're fascinated with them because they mark us with  
unconscious remembrance of a simpler time.

Inside the womb.

Cut from the umbilical cord, separated from the source, life becomes  
complicated.

No more floating along in a temperature controlled swimming  
pool

No more security in a finite space

No more constant connection to the comforting  
rhythmic

"lub dub, lub dub".

Outside the womb...

Sometimes it's warm, sometimes chilly.

There's that sensation of intermittently damp and dirty diaper;

The new reality of light in the eyes;

rumbling hunger in the belly;

tears and tantrums may be necessary to bring nourishment once provided automatically from Mom.

And the discomfoting strangeness of unlimited space—

Someone swaddle me, please!

Put me close to your heartbeat.

From a world of wholeness to a world of fragmentation and anxiety with that last push. That first breath.

Much of this new world brings joy:

the emotional expressions of love,

visual experiences of beauty,

intellectual satisfaction resulting from problems solved.

In that panoply of complexity will come physical pleasures too:

splashing in the bath, or a mud puddle;

cuddling to nurse, eating a first ice cream;

finding toes , a belly button;

giving and receiving a first kiss.

But when life in its fullness feels more like a 1000 piece jigsaw puzzle, how does a sane person return to Wholeness? Comfort? My mother used to call it being Calm, Cool, and Collected. (Now that's a rock song.) Is there a pill for that? A prayer for that?

Mark tells the story of a woman who is disconnected, fragmented in a different way. She is living with an unmanageable, incurable gynecological disorder, a circumstance leaving her permanently ritually unclean. Wholeness—has been taken from her. She is isolated, shunned, alone, not only a few days a month, all days, every month. She is broken: physically, emotionally, socially. If she has a family, they have abandoned her. If she had a source of food, it is from

begging. If she has a home, it squalid. Hers is a fragile, fragmented life in, body, soul, spirit.

She has come to believe that Jesus has the power to restore her, that he is the Source of making her whole.

Longing, seeking, she reaches out her hand, finds his robe (not even his foot, or hand... his robe). Jesus recognizes that power moved out of him. "Your faith has made you well, healed, whole." That's what happens when we connect back to our Source. The one from whom we came, were originally connected with, in whose image we are made.

Her arm, her hand, his robe, healing flowed between them as between a Mother and Child in the womb.

Touch.

It's primal. It's healing.

It will be what is primal that will lead us back to the Source.

Our Hebrew Scripture reading tells of a People broken down and weary. It is 539 BC. Remnants of Israelite exiles have been returning from Babylon to Judah. There is joy—they are home, but they are immigrants in their own country. Many live in poverty... Are economically oppressed...Are victims watching political in-fighting... separated from family still back in Babylon... Iraq. They wonder who are we? How can we be Jewish without the temple, destroyed 60 years before? They are free, but broken; home, but insecure. Fragmented.

What will be their Source of wholeness?

Delphi in Greece, Karnak in Egypt, Cuzco in Peru, Mecca in Arabia, Jerusalem in the Middle East. What do these cities have in common?



They were, and some still are, known as “the navel of the universe”. The axis mundi. The place of earth’s origins. The place where heaven meets earth. The Prophet Ezekiel (yes, he was a bit nutty) speaks of Jerusalem as the Center, better translation, the Navel (belly button) of the Universe.

An aside ..If even today you visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem you will see the Omphalos, a Medieval Stone relic believed in first millennium to mark this navel of the earth.

Back to those returnees from Babylon. When Isaiah speaks to them he gives neither sympathy nor reprimand; he neither suggests a building plan for the temple nor calls for a community organizer. He offers his imagination. Poetry. Hope. No, Isaiah writes Jerusalem is no longer the jewel she was before they left, but she remains their Source, the place of connection with God, the place where God meets them.

To all who are mourning, no need to be discouraged in Jerusalem's condition. God says, she will again to flourish, like an overflowing stream.

And there's more. Spoken in more intimate imagery. Jerusalem will be for you like.... A mother nursing her infant (not a malnourished suffering woman) but one with breasts abundant with nourishment! So drink deeply from her, Isaiah tells them. Let her life-giving, milk bring you back to Wholeness. Like a mother, Jerusalem will carry you, and you will enjoy sitting on her lap, dandling on her knee. Content. Secure.

And then Isaiah shockingly shifts "voice". No longer is God speaking of Jerusalem as Mother, God speaking of God-self as Mother.

Not only will Jerusalem "mother" the returned exiles, God, the Holy One, Creator of the Universe will mother them. Like a child at the Mother's side, she will be made whole.

Why should this surprise us? Once life-supported through the umbilical cord, for fluid, blood, food, oxygen, the separated child knows innately to return to his source, his mother, for continuing life.

It's primal.

What it is about belly buttons? Maybe it's a reminder that at our origins we were connected—whole—nurtured. And no matter how many years pass since our birth, especially when complexity of our lives becomes overwhelming, we still long to return there to find our integrity, our wholeness.

It's primal.

I have taken you to two scripture passages illustrating how restoration comes from connecting with the Source of Life—The

Jesus' God-energy to a chronically ill woman; the Mother-God energy to returned exiles living in Jerusalem.

Return with me now to those times when you have felt the fragmented nature of your life. Not necessarily times of acute illness. Not necessarily a time of societal crisis, but those ordinary times when the pieces of your life are all floating around leaving you at sixes and sevens. What brings you back together? Where is the connecting place where-- or the activity by which-- you get re-collected, put back together again?

The answer will be primal. We will not connect through technology. Drugs. Alcohol. Food. Even chocolate. (But I agree, that's primal too).

Maybe for you it will be Mother Church The liturgy, the music, the people, the familiar windows. A familiar hymn. The smell of

communion bread. Grape juice. In some traditions, it is contemplation on the cross – the symbol of earth meeting heaven.

Maybe for you it will be Mother Earth. I know there are plenty of jokes about going to worship on the waves, or at the church on the dunes. No need to joke; being restored in nature is scientifically observable, and experienced spiritual reality. Just walking barefoot on the grass reconnects to Creation. It's called "earthing".

Maybe you connect through Music. Physicians and nurses know that music heals—King David knew that 2500 years ago. Neuroscientists are finding that acoustic vibrations stimulate areas of the brain compromised in Parkinson's disease, depression, even Alzheimer's Disease. Music connects the listener with the rhythms of the universe.

Or maybe the connection for you is through Art. Woodworking. I have discovered that the practice of iconography collects me. Is it the

subject matter?(angels, Christ, Mary, Saints) Or the intense concentration required? Or the necessary prayer? Or is it the elements of the earth with which I work. Wood. Water. Natural earth and mineral pigment. Clay. Gold. Vodka.

And, for many of us, on that list of ways to connect to our Source will be :

Children. Our own. Our grandchildren. Our nieces or nephews. Someone else's.

I know I've shared this story before—a three-year-old child insisted that he wanted to be alone with his newborn brother. The parents were reluctant but as the child persisted they agreed to let the two boys alone, but listened just outside the room.

“Tell me what God is like, cause I'm starting to forget.”

It is in being with children not so long separated from the source of their Life; in being with them, that through the love given and received we open ourselves to the connection God longs to restore to us, that connection which collects us into wholeness.

That's what I'll be thinking about when a two year old comes up to me and shows me his belly button.