“Co-Creators in Christ”

Ephesians 1:3-14 John 1:1-18

Second Sunday of Christmas, Year B, January 3, 2021

First Presbyterian Church, Sandpoint, Idaho

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 As we see these passages from Ephesians, but especially John, we see very developed Christology and highly reverent expressions of the cosmic Christ loving things into being. I’d like to reflect through a couple of stories to play on the theme of becoming co-creators in Christ.

 In 2017, First Presbyterian Church and I had a time of Sabbatical. The overall theme was the “spirituality of beekeeping,” with a meditative tone. The intention was to slow down, take things on a non-frenzied pace. At the same time, the three months of travel in Europe and the U.K. for my wife and I involved many once-in-a-lifetime-experiences stacked back to back. Lots of activity, but a slower pace within each activity.

 This is why we signed up to rent a canal boat in Scotland. The Union Canal between Falkirk and Edinburgh allows travel by water on the restored canal as you float through the countryside, under bridges, through tunnels, and tie up along the shore to enjoy the quiet nights away from crowds. A canal boat goes slow, you are not supposed to allow a wake to crest as it hits the shore, so these long, narrow boats move only about 3 or 4 miles an hour as the diesel engine turns the propeller and you captain the boat from the rear deck as you hold the tiller to steer the rutter.

 This was all new to me. Renting a canal boat is kind of like renting a motorhome; you travel and live in the boat for about a week. Picking up the boat at the [Black Prince rental company](https://www.black-prince.com/glasgow-edinburgh-canal-boat-holiday/), the very quick orientation by a man with a strong Scottish accent was like drinking from a firehose. Next thing I new, I was in a lock, the water level rising to lift the boat, the gate opened, and into the lagoon we went as I moved the throttle forward.

 Those boats have to be moving in order to steer. No gear, no steer. Maneuvering the 56 foot long narrow boat into the world-famous Falkirk Wheel was no small effort, especially with the stormy wind. As the rain fell, the tourists at this world heritage site were not deterred as they took pictures and videos of us as we headed to the gondola for this rotating boat lift. (There are [You Tube videos](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_tBH9SE-Kw8&t=1s) featuring this process, so check those out if you want a closer look). For now, just realize that I was rather nervous and inexperienced. And I noticed, that in my mind, I kept second-guessing myself. But I also new in that moment that I was committed, so I told the doubts to stop. With God’s help, I needed to focus on moving forward in the best way possible. And it worked!

 Renting canal boats is marketed as a great way to relax. That was what attracted us for this Sabbatical that intentionally wanted time to slow down and focus on simply “being.” The reality is, there is not a moments rest when you are the captain, standing on the rear deck, the tiller in one hand and the throttle in the other. You’re trying to stay alert for hours, coming around blind corners, avoiding posts and stone columns of bridges, waiting your turn and then navigating one boat at a time across ancient aqueducts far above the valley floor, or even floating over a highway with traffic going under you. There’s also systems that need dealt with, like calling in a reservation for the staffed locks, yet using a cell phone with lousy reception and talking with an engineer who you can’t understand because their accent is so strong, almost as strong as their attitude of annoyance that you didn’t give the proper 24-hour notice, and them not budging in their scheduled regiment.

 How do you relax into an experience that involves turning around a very long boat in a narrow passage, getting through locks without crashing into vital equipment, and trying not to run into other boats as you come around blind corners in lousy weather after standing on that rear deck for hours in a north Atlantic rain storm as the locals remind you, “You don’t come to Scotland for the weather!”

 It has relaxing moments, like settling in to make dinner once your boat is tied up for the night, getting out to walk along the towpath to stretch your legs, or sitting in the bow section where you can’t hear the engine and you silently slip along the canal. You know, I wouldn’t likely sign up for this again, but I wouldn’t trade that experience for anything. Going through the Falkirk Wheel and touring Scotland in this unique way was a gift. In terms of metaphor, it’s a good reminder of the need for balance, having both silent contemplation and action; that life involves constant motion and transition, and yet there’s a need to find a grounding center, to lean into life with trust. Even when your canal boat is parked along the shore, the water is flowing underneath, holding you as the boat rests, working with the current, going with the flow. This is co-creating, coming alongside life as it unfolds “as life” in whatever unique expressions we are gifted to share. Faith in Christ invites us to an awareness of the unique expressions, no matter where we are or what the circumstance. Life, like energy, never stops; it only changes form.

 The other morning I started clearing snow before the sun was up. Flakes were still coming down as the porch lights lit up the driveway. Shawna had an early start to get up Schweitzer Mountain to teach skiing, and I wanted to get the driveway somewhat clear before the car packed down that heavy snow. I got most of it cleared, then I headed down Shiras Drive, our little dirt road to help clear off the heavy layer. Daylight gradually strengthened as time went on, and I made one pass after another, gaining a wider swath with each effort.

 At one point going along our road, I noticed that I was all hunched over, pushing the snow blower, even though it was self-propelled. I was really man-handling that machine, and I noticed my posture was really lousy: scrunched up shoulders, tense neck, hands squeezing the levers really tightly, and I was bent over, which strained my legs and back. As the machine spewed the snow out, I gradually became more aware of my body and changed my posture as I walked. I stood up straighter, relaxed my shoulders, loosened my grip and allowed the machine to do the heavy work. I did less forcing and more guiding, making subtle adjustments using the leverage of my hip on the handle instead of trying to muscle it. I continually relaxed more and more, but then came to a section where the heavy snow was deeper.

 As the machine chugged on, snow was falling out to the side; the scoop part was getting overloaded as I forced my way along the road. I stopped for a moment, allowing the rotating augers to catch up with the load. Then I adjusted the speed of the self-propel feature to the slowest forward motion. By slowing down, taking each step intentionally, it was possible to clear more snow, more effectively, than if I was pushing, straining, and rushing.

 What a metaphor for spiritual awareness and growing in the depth of faith! This morning’s passages from John’s Gospel and the letter to the Ephesians celebrate God’s gracious gift of Christ and how we are found, in Christ, invited to become co-creators with Christ. As I worked clearing snow, this became an embodied prayer, reminding me that sometimes it’s not what we do, but how we do it that makes a difference in life. Spiritual disciplines help us claim a posture of openness, patience, and humility, even as we engage in action to make a difference in the world. But mostly, it’s love that makes the difference. We are called to love because we are loved by Love.

 To co-create with God in your life, are you straining, like pushing your will and way? Or do you allow the Spirit to pull you forward as you learn to quiet your mind, deepen your heart, get in touch with your body, and patiently invite your soul to live into the creative process of living life in its fullness?

 God is creative. God blesses us in Christ beyond measure. God creates all things in and through Christ for God’s own good pleasure and will. This is not an isolated process; we are invited into this as children of God. We are invited through Love, blessed in Christ with spiritual blessing, chosen even before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in love. Love is God’s action and energy that defines us. May we continue to find ways to stay connected to this unending love, especially when its a struggle just to hold on. How do you do what you do? What is your stance, your posture; what’s your focus during the labor of loving service? May all we do, and how we do this, be shaped from a foundation of the restful Presence of Love. Thanks be to God for gathering all things in Christ, to the praise of God’s glory. Amen.