

Easter 4
Church of the Good Shepherd, Silver City, NM

April 17, 2016
Rev. Paul Moore

The Power of One

Brian Swimm told a story to which I have added my own ending. Many of you have heard it before, but it is a good way to get into today's topic.

It tells the story of a hawk in the desert. He wakes up one morning hungry, and he goes hunting all day long. By that evening he is VERY hungry, but not having caught anything, he sleeps on an empty stomach. Being a religious hawk, before he goes to bed he kneels on the edge of his perch to say his prayers. At the end he adds a special petition.

“God of the universe, you know I am going to bed hungry. You know that if I do not catch something within a certain number of days I will starve to death. You know that this is an end to which I do not want to succumb. Now, I have chased rabbits all day long, and have caught nothing. The rabbits in this part of the desert seem to be exceedingly fast. Could you please slow them down a bit for tomorrow?”

The Creator, being of a kind heart, hears the hawk's prayer, smiles a knowing smile, and grants him his wish. The next morning the hawk wakes up really hungry. Soon he spies a rabbit hopping across the desert. He flies after it as fast as he can. Sure enough, unlike yesterday, he obtains a nice breakfast, and eats his fill.

Do you know what happens when a hawk eats its fill? Its body, being built for feast or famine, puts on the weight against another dry day. He gains a few ounces. And being just slightly more rotund than before, he is just a bit slower than he was before, because he is carting around extra weight. The NEXT day, once again, he goes to bed hungry, unable to secure for himself any dinner.

Once again, the hawk says his prayers. He is careful to thank the good Lord for the meal the previous day, and then he observes that the rabbits seem to be fast again for he has not caught anything all day, and he is feeling the hunger pangs again. “Lord, would you please slow the rabbits down once again?”

The Creator, being of a kind heart, hears the hawk's prayer and smiles a knowing smile, and grants him his wish. The next morning the hawk wakes up hungry. Soon he spies a rabbit hopping across the desert. He flies after it as fast as his slightly more portly frame will take him. Sure enough, he obtains a nice breakfast and eats his fill.

This cycle repeats itself several more times until one day, being really well-rounded out by now, the hawk alters the prayer slightly.

“Dear Lord, I know this is probably pushing things too far, and I know you've given me sharp talons and beak, but is the killing of the rabbit really necessary? Could you just have one laying out there dead in the morning?”

The Creator, being of a kind heart, hears the hawk's prayer and smiles a knowing smile, and grants him his wish. The next morning the hawk wakes up hungry. He looks out over the desert and there, under a cactus, is a dead rabbit. He sails down slowly and lands beside it. As he does so he notices another bird, walking up from around a bush. This bird also has his eye on the dead rabbit, only this bird is solid black, with no feathers on its head, and his talons are really not all that sharp. In fact, he looks just like a vulture!

Well, our hawk friend is not going to eat the hawk's rabbit, if he has anything to do with it! The two birds soon get into a royal brawl, rolling and pecking at one another, until they roll down a hill to a cattle tank, full of fresh water. Neither of them really wanting to get wet, they break off the fight. The hawk stands by the water beside his adversary and his eye catches their reflection in the water. There, looking back at him are TWO black birds with no feathers on their heads and dull talons, and there is no hawk to be seen.

This story teaches us about the unity of all things in two ways. First of all, the hawk and the rabbit cannot be understood apart from one another. The speed of the hawk makes the rabbits fast, and the speed of the rabbit makes the hawk fast. Each in turn makes the other what it is. Both of them belong together, for really, they are both balancing parts of the great web of life in which they both live and move and have their being. The study of ecology is the study of life systems. It does not look so much at any one life form, but in the whole picture, the unitive reality of creation in which nothing exists but in relationship to everything else, for in the end all are one.

Second, death is the great equalizer. Often a hawk will catch and eat its fill on an animal of prey too big for it to consume or carry back to the nest, and the vultures finish off what it leaves behind. In the end the hawk will die and the vultures may very well consume his remains. Before the reality of death the oneness of all things is really much more easily seen, be it the death of our bodies, those of a loved ones or the death of the rule of our egos that imagines that we really are distinct, when in reality we are all one.

This is a long introduction to a simple idea. Jesus names it succinctly in today's Gospel

lesson: “I and the Father are one.” You cannot understand Jesus apart from the Father, and we would know nothing of the Father were it not for the Son, whom we know in Jesus. Furthermore, in John 17 Jesus prays that we and he might be one even as he and the Father are one. One cannot understand who we are apart from Jesus, we cannot fully understand Jesus apart from us, and we cannot fully understand any one of us apart from the rest of us.

It all comes crystal clear when you see Peter in Joppa. Peter, knowing himself to be one with the Author of Life, whom death itself could not hold, and in union with whom our own deaths are transformed, stands before the deathbed of Dorcas. With a word she is returned to life. Jesus is alive, therefore Peter is alive, therefore Dorcas is made to be alive once again. It all works because Jesus and the Father are one, and Jesus and we are one—therefore Peter and Dorcas are one, along with the rest of us.

The relationship of Jesus and the Father is the ecology of the universe, the big picture context in which all is related to all in the great web of redemption that casts its edges around the whole of creation.

One of the most pervasive heresies in the Church today is a sinister division, a line we draw between Jesus as God and we as human. Yes, God is holy, perfect and without inconsistency or fault, and we are broken, full of sin and fault, but our brokenness is not part of our humanity. (After all, Jesus was human and according to the author of Hebrews, he committed no sin.) It is easy to slip into a new kind of Gnosticism that says that we are human—therefore sinful and bad, and Jesus is God—and therefore holy and good, and we only get what Jesus has because Jesus is incredibly generous and gives us what is not ours so that we can get to heaven.

This heresy faced the Church in the 3rd century. It is called Docetism, and it so emphasized the divinity of Jesus that it lost sight of his humanity. Docetism robs the Church of its power. If Christ is not really human then we are not one with Christ. If we are not one with Christ then we are no longer the hands and feet of Christ in the world. All that is left to us is to save our own little souls and plead feebly with others to do the same. We have no moral voice in the world to speak against injustice and alienation. It ends up being convenient, an easy salvation with no real demands.

But Jesus declares, “I and the Father are one,” and he prays that he and we might be one and that we might be one with one another. Infused, then, with the presence of Jesus, we are freed to live according to our truest, deepest selves, the you that knows how to love as you are loved; to give as generously as you have received; to feed as we have been fed; to welcome as we have been welcomed, and draw the whole world into the

saving embrace of the Savior on the Cross—whose arms are also our arms and whose feet are also our feet.

“I and the Father are one” means that we are being caught up in what God is doing in the world, called to stand at once in contrast to the ego-driven, dualistic and alienated way the world lives, even as, living in the world, we draw the world into awareness of the great Love of God that contains all.

During Easter we are talking about what the Resurrection costs us. The resurrection costs us any convenient and easy salvation that puts God way up there with Jesus and we way down here with our sin and brokenness. In the resurrection the division is overcome, the alienation is healed, and we are made one with Christ. If one with Christ, then one with the Father, and with one another, and with the great mission of Christ in the world.

How, then, are you living out the Christ-mission in your life? Where are you bringing that which is alienated back into reconciliation? How are you drawing that which is divided into wholeness? How are you reaching your arms of love out around the world and bringing it back to life again?