

Becoming Whole
Ephesians 1:3-14
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First Central Congregational UCC
29 March 2015

This is a hymn of praise to God. Blessing God for God's salvation. This is poetry. This is song.

And the lyric asks us to use our imaginations to envision a God who, according to Boston College professor Pheme Perkins, "encompasses the whole cosmos and who is active in all of creation."

Just imagine—all those images of deep space, of supernova and pulsars, of stars being born and galaxies colliding. Imagine the workings of a cell—the mitochondria, the DNA replicating itself. Or the sub-atomic level—the electrons snapping around their fields of probabilities, the mysterious Higgs Boson, the fundamental forces and particles of existence.

The One who encompasses all of that desires our salvation. Desires that we be whole. That we be our best selves. And in order to achieve that, God has reached out to us, offering the path of holiness as the way to salvation.

It is in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One that the redemption of God has been made manifest. The profound claim of this song of thanksgiving is that the entire cosmos has been ordered according to the Body of Christ. Everything from those fundamental sub-atomic particles to the supernova have been shaped by Christ. For, as the song tells us, it is in Christ that God will gather all things together. It is in Christ that we can hope. It is in Christ that we are delivered unto glory.

The Quaker pastor Richard Foster, upon whom I have relied throughout this Lenten sermon series, wrote that "Holiness gives us our truest, fullest humanity. In holiness we become the persons we were created to be." Holiness is the transformation of our inner selves, our character, to be closer to God. We are invited to follow the path to holiness laid down by Christ so that we too might participate in God's dream and become whole.

Like these cairns, which many cultures use to mark paths, Christ is the trail marker for us our journey to being whole. We follow the path marked by Jesus of Nazareth, who demonstrated what it means to be divine by demonstrating what it means to be a human being. His life of love, joy, healing, and hope is our model. As we imitate and participate in the life of Jesus, we are drawn closer to God and we become whole.

"A holy life," Foster wrote, "simply is a life that works." It works because it is a life in touch with reality. For a life modeled upon Jesus is a life in tune with God's design of the cosmos.

Holiness, then, is not about rules and regulations. Not otherworldly. Not ascetic or perfectionist or pietistic or exclusive.

Rather it is the world-affirming, harmonious, gracious, incarnational, attentive, disciplined, joyful, habitual, and loving embrace of the way of life that Jesus revealed. A life

that transforms us into our best and truest selves.

The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins expresses this theme in his own song of praise:

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves — goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came.*

I say móre: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: thát keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —
Christ — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

Christ plays in ten thousand places. The holiness of God is manifest in each of us and in the beauty of the cosmos—in the birds and insects and stones tossed down wells.

And the one thing we must do to become truly ourselves, Hopkins sings, is to let loose the Christ that dwells within.

So be in Christ for Christ is in you. Take up our crosses and challenge everything that opposes God's reign. Become God's agents of love and forgiveness, justice and hope, that God's will might be done on earth as it is in the heavens. And you will be transformed.

On this Palm Sunday and throughout this Holy Week, God beckons to you "Be holy that you might become whole."