

## **The Wisdom of Letting be**

**Genesis 1:1-5;**

**Mark 1:4-11** *Ute Molitor, First Congregational UCC in Camden, January 7, 2024*

### **Genesis 1:1-5**

*When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*

### **Mark 1:4-11**

*And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

*At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

When you hear the words "Let there be," what comes to mind for you? I find I almost immediately think of the Beatles song by Paul McCartney entitled "Let it Be" even though the words don't match perfectly. Folks, feel free to sing along.

We will hear the audio of the song and the words are in the bulletin.

*When I find myself in times of trouble,  
Mother Mary comes to me  
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be  
And in my hour of darkness she is standing right in front of me  
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be*

*Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be  
Whisper words of wisdom, let it be*

Let's let these words and the music resonate in us for a moment. What did it feel like to sing these words? What emotions, what kind of mood, do they evoke in you? **Gather Responses (chat line)**

Personally, I find them very calming and reassuring. There is more than one story about what or who really inspired this song for McCartney. One alludes to the fact that he lost his mother whose name was Mary when he was a teenager and that her presence in a dream offered him a deep reassurance.<sup>1</sup> Of course, one can also connect this song with Jesus' mother, Mary, if so inclined. Whatever the source, McCartney sang this song an encouragement for all of us to trust that we will be carried through hard times, that our losses and burdens are held in grace, come what may. I imagine that there is something in us which can relate. Perhaps you are grappling with the death of a loved one and the need to know that they are ok and that you can be as well. We may be dealing with a disappointment, an illness, a difficult transition in our lives, a time of overwhelm at work or in a relationship.

When we trust and let go in this way, it can feel like a tremendous unburdening and releasing. It is a reminder to "Let it Be". We cannot and are not called to micro-manage and control every aspect of our lives. Rather, we are invited to participate in our lives with our whole being and trust in the grace and love which

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<sup>1</sup> Another version of what inspired the song states that he had a dream in which his manager was encouraging him to "let it be" during a stressful time.

can carry the fullness of our experience. I have often found such amazing grace among church members who are dealing with illness and uncertainty and can still trust the power of letting go into love and embracing each day as a gift.

Such a grounded way of embracing what is real in our lives stands in stark contrast to other messages that can be prominent in our culture. I remember driving through a small Wisconsin town a few years ago to meet old friends for breakfast. It was a town that was hard hit economically even before the pandemic. As I slowly drove down Main Street, I noticed a pub on a side street called “Whatever.” When I looked down another side street further down, I saw another pub named “Never Mind.” I kid you not!

“Whatever!” “Never Mind!” Notice what energy these words carry for you. Just say them to yourself few times, perhaps with your eyes closed. – **Gather Responses** - I imagine most of us have also been there. For me, these words can carry an energy of resignation, cynicism, or shutting down. We may have felt exhausted, helpless, or exacerbated because of some on-going challenge in our lives or in the face of so many cruelties and injustices we witness in the world: the cruelty of war in Palestine/Israel and the Ukraine (and the ways religion has been used to exacerbate the problems), the Climate crisis, economic inequities, the refusal to enact better gun control laws, the growing leaning toward autocratic leadership and so much more. Getting plastered in a pub may sound like a source of relief and letting go but it does tend to come with a bad hangover. Moreover, nothing changes except that we deepen the spiral of frustration, stuckness, and

often shame. This is not the kind of letting be and allowing featured in our scripture passages today.

Let's look at the Genesis text which offers a participatory and poetic (rather than literal) vision of life. I love the dynamism of the creative process described here. It almost feels like God is daring to unleash a movement whose outcome maybe not even God can predict. There is no foreordained notion of what will happen next. Into initial chaos in which once cannot see, God says: "Let there be light" and enjoys what happens, calling it "good." Because of this daring step into the unknown, the day evolves offering light for interaction, growth, creation of beauty and connection in the world. There is also the night now, this needed time of resting and letting go, of fertile darkness which is equally needed for growth and renewal. Rhythms and cycles are evolving.

God has fundamentally set loose, let be, the energies that are alive to come to a fuller fruition, freedom, agency, and focus. God will not micro-manage this process but participates in it and allows it to unfold. As the creation story continues, more and more entities and beings come into existence, all emergent from God's daring acts, all carrying dignity and worth. There is room for newness in this creative process. There is room for the un-expected, for great emergences as well as endings and transformations.

How will we as humans respond to the invitation to live our part within such organic and dynamic unfolding? What spirit and attitudes foster our participation? To explore these questions, I would like to share a poem by Kei

Miller with you which reflects on the creative spirit. He is a Jamaican poet who grew up in a fundamentalist faith tradition in a culture which was so long subject to colonial rule and oppression. His poem is called “Book of Creation.” I will read it twice:

*Suppose there was a book full only of the word,  
let – from whose clipped sound all things began: fir  
and firmament, feather, the first whale — and suppose  
we could scroll through its pages every day  
to find and pronounce a Let meant only for us —  
we would stumble through the streets with open books,  
eyes crossed from too much reading; we would speak  
in auto-rhyme, the world would echo itself — and still  
we’d continue in rounds, saying let and let and let  
until even silent dreams had been allowed.*

Can you sense the freeing and engaging power of the word “Let” in this poem? I hear amazement and celebration in this poem in response to the experience of aliveness. The very fact that anything exists is worthy of praise. I also hear the sense empowerment and perhaps even giddy joy of realizing that we, too, are invited to speak “let” into the world in our own unique way. Such realizations likely ring even louder and truer for people who have experienced oppression and subjugation. The poet declares that our inherent worth is given in creation, as is the invitation to say yes to life, to show up, to celebrate its emergence in everything around and within us, to live into our potential. The very life of this wild and amazing earth is enlivened and depends on every cell, atom, quark, every evolving creature to engage in such presencing. Then the world can echo itself with aliveness and even what we may have only dared to dream can become a reality. We are called to do this together as if singing in rounds – “let, let,

let”....allowing for possibility, newness, transformation – even when we cannot know the outcome.

Such living is also at the heart of our baptism. In our text from the *Gospel of Mark*, we find Jesus modeling his willingness to step into the flowing river of life with a receptive and open heart. The river can represent the flowing and ever-changing experiences in our lives. Jesus is indicating his desire to participate in the thousand joys and sorrows of life as one rooted in divine love. He is saying his yes to “letting be” that which is to emerge because of his presence and witness in this world. As he steps forth and immerses himself symbolically, he is also blessed by the Holy Spirit and hears the words: *“You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”*

*“You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”* These words are spoken to all of us as an abiding blessing and invitation to say our “Let it be...” What would it be like to spend time this week repeating the word “Let” as though it were the only word in the book of our lives? Likewise, what is waiting to emerge in and from you and what is waiting to be released?

What is deserving of our praise as we celebrate its inherent aliveness? Why not find yourself praising the trees, even the cold wind, the warmth of the hearth, the smile of a loved one and remembering the power of the “Let” which spoke all this into being?

Can we also risk the letting be into trust regarding the things we cannot change which is not the same as just condoning them. We may be called to release or “let

be” the old destructive stories about ourselves or to dare “letting” our own unique calling come to fruition. It may be a daring “let” to be part of shaping a more compassionate and just world better world against all the odds we may perceive. How are you, how are we called to say “Let...!” in our own lives at this time? What dream for our world are you called to help nurture into existence? What pain in the world do you need to let your heart crack open so that the light of God’s compassion can radiate forth through you, held in community?

Let me close this morning with a chant from the Sufi tradition, a mystical path within Islam. I just learned it from my spiritual guide, Stephen Wright, during a contemplative week on Iona. This chant speaks of the eagerness to reflect and serve the beauty of love and its power which can emerge when we let the God’s love shape our lives.

Let my heart reflect thy light, Lord, as the moon reflects the light of the sun in love, always in love (2x). Hu Allah, Allahu Allah, Allahu Allah, Allahu (2x).

May it be so.