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ONE HUMAN FAMILY

This is the sixth time I have been invited to address this congregation. As I am still a Presbyterian minister, in fact, Pastor Emeritus of Mt Auburn Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, I must confess that I am quite at home here at Harbor UU. Further, I believe that your liberal, inclusive, and universal witness, seeking truth and wisdom from all religious faiths, is what most churches need a stronger dose of, including my own denomination.

While in Cincinnati, I also served on the Board of the Metropolitan Area Religious Coalition of Cincinnati. For 19 years I met with them every Friday morning working on whatever social justice issues and other maladies that needed attention in the metropolitan area.

I represented the Presbyterians at that table, the other representatives were Roman Catholic, a great variety of other Protestants denominations, the Salvation Army, Quakers, Jews Muslims, and Unitarian-Universalists. (There were four U U Congregations in the city.) Our board represented Liberal, Orthodox, and Reform religious persuasions. We would debate issues and then act on them after we found consensus. We sought common ground on issues even though we had different customs and theological views. And, you know, it worked out pretty well.

I mention this because I want to speak today of the One Human Family that we need more to be, and I particularly want to lift up this theme out of the particular faith I am rooted in, the Hebrew-Christian tradition, although as is suggested by the bulletin insert, not exclusively so.

In Christian Churches, once a year, we celebrate World Communion Sunday. Its focus is to highlight our oneness with every individual Christian congregation around the world, all celebrating in their own tongue and manner, communion - the Lord's Supper together - on this same day.

World Communion Sunday initially began in the Presbyterian Church in the early 1930's but is celebrated in most all Christian denominations today.

It is a serious reminder that there is one world, one human family, beyond our own particular local faith, and we need to recognize that because Jesus, himself was an inclusive one-worlder, lifting up the unity of all life in this world no matter its peculiarities and geographies.

Yes, we need to be reminded that we are One Human Family on this earth. Yet it ought to be just as obvious, given how fractured the world has been and is, how raw are the disagreements among nations and cultures, that we as One Human Family, is a very shaky reality. Of course, some would quickly say that the idea of One Human Family is nothing more than a far-fetched utopian idea. But others would argue that it is an urgent and pragmatic necessity given the shape we are in, and we must regain its promise as a faithful, unifying vision for this earth.

David Brooks of the NYT recently wrote in his column, "America has always been a divided, sprawling country, but for most of its history it was held together by a unifying national story" of liberty and equality for all. But, he added, it is no longer. "We have a national identity crisis."

Since our last presidential election, and its outcome, which surely has been an embarrassment to civility, honesty, and truth, and, even worse, a threat to world peace, we have only intensified our fears and our own national story has become less unifying and even more of a crisis. We know a political adjustment was in order – and hopefully that was what the mid-term election was all about.

But let me say that the task to keep the world from unraveling, damaging the One Human Family on this earth, is a religious task as well as a political one. The very root of the word religion is to rebind, to gather together, to create a bonding, a holy communion. But we are failing at that.

We all hopefully remember Casey, the preacher who gave up on preaching, in Steinbeck's, *The Grapes of Wrath*. It was a time that immigration wasn't a matter of the frightened and disposed people coming to our shores from afar, but the time of our mid-west dust bowls, with many of our own citizens migrating to the Western states hoping to eke out a living, just to stay alive. Casey was a stranger to the Joad family migrating from Oklahoma but they met on this sad but necessary Exodus, and he was invited to their breakfast table to share what

little food they had. Grandma insisted that someone say a prayer first and finally, and apologetically, Casey complied. He rambled on a bit and then said,

“I ain’t sayin’ I’m like Jesus, but I got tired like Him, an’ I got mixed up like Him, an’ I went into the wilderness like Him, without no campin’ stuff...”

“Hallelujah,” says Granma, and she rocked a little, back and forth, trying to catch hold of an ecstasy.

“An’ I got to thinkin’,” Casey went on, “on’y it wasn’t thinking, it was deeper down than thinkin’. I got thinkin’ how we was holy when we was one thing, an’ mankin’ was holy when it was one thing. An’ it on’y got unholy when one mis’able little fella got the bit in his teeth an’ run off his own way, kickin’ an’ draggin’ an’ fightin’. Fella like that bust the holiness. But when they’re all workin’ together, not one fella for another fella, but one fella kind of harnessed to the whole shebang – that’ right, that’s holy.”

Casey is right. That’s holiness.

Yes, we need to rise up and realize that the whole shebang, this great commonwealth, is what we are meant to serve, that we are indeed One Human Family, and some of our family live in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala.

That was the concerned world view of Jesus or why else would he say we must love our neighbor as ourselves? The goal of becoming a self is not through unilateralism, one person, or group, or nation, kickin’ and’ draggin’ and fightin’ and going off on their own. That sounds like the behavior of our present Administration. Such a lone ranger attitude is a false and reckless political strategy and will not fulfill our hymn that the earth might be fair and all its people one.

So let me offer from our Biblical heritage several passages that lift up the unifying hope of One Human Family. In the Book of Acts the Apostle Paul’s trip to Athens Greece is recorded. It has become more personal to me since I led a group from my former church to Greece and climbed the Areopagus where Paul had his discussions with the philosophers of that day. I could go on at some length about Paul’s encounter there, but notice just one thing. Paul sees many

statues to various gods but what really disturbs him is one statue to an unknown god.

Of course, Paul had no place in his world view for many gods or any unknown God, and so he goes on to explain to the crowd that God is one.

Monotheism, the belief that God is one, developed out of Paul's own Jewish tradition, and it was now central to Paul's new Christian faith. Seven hundred years later monotheism would become a strict doctrine as well in Islam. Mahomet stressed the oneness of God both to help unify the warring tribes of the Arabian Peninsula but also because he thought that Christianity's stress on the Trinity, which seemed to him to proclaim three Gods was problematic, confusing, and divisive. So, say Unitarian's historically. As do I.

But Paul, facing the crowd gathered around him, declares to them something I think is absolutely right, no matter where it originated, or who was saying it.

Look, Athenians, Paul says, to the epicureans, stoics and cynics of Greece:

*“the God who made the world and everything in it gives to all persons life and breath and everything, **for from one blood God made everyone to live on the face of the earth** so that they might feel after God and find God.”*

And he goes on to tell them that-

*“God is not far from each one of us, for in God we live and move and have our being, even as some of your poets have said, for we are indeed **all God's offspring.**”*

Paul is telling the people of Athens, we are all one family! One blood! All of the same parentage! Quite a declaration, indeed!

But let me share a second passage lifting up, that we are One Human Family. It is found in the first few pages of the Bible, the human Creation story. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female.” Again, we are all One Human Family and our DNA can be traced back

to God, the Divine and Universal One who “makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” No exceptions

And yet, only at our best have we fully believed that, that we have the same ancestor. Instead, we have been involved in busting up the holiness of this essential truth, that we are of one blood, and pridefully and egotistically demanding our own way.

And the first example of this, in this ancient story, is the man Cain, who out of jealousy, slays his brother, Abel. And when the Divine Creator confronts Cain as to where is his brother, he lies! “I don’t know; am I my brother’s keeper?” Yes, Cain you have a responsibility to him and he to you, is the Divine judgement.

I suppose if you voted on the utilitarian party ticket, you may not agree to a common responsibility. Regardless Cain’s behavior remains the original symbol of how we all have a human propensity to mess things up, to sin. But the unity dream, the reality of the One Human Family working together, would not fade.

It persists, in part, in all the major religions, clearly reflected in their common Golden Rule, as you see displayed in the bulletin. **We are to treat our neighbor, the other, as we would treat ourselves.** That is a marvelous indication that we are called to behave as One Human Family. But Jesus discovered that by neighbor, we may mean only those of our kind, the same community, the same country, the same race, the same class. And that’s why he taught the most gracious of neighborly stories that of the Good Samaritan, this foreigner who knew only that a neighbor was any human being, foreigner or domestic in need. Jesus universalized and redefined the term neighbor as anyone in need, anyone at all, and we are all in need of one another.

For One Human Family will not exist without compassion and equity. That’s why Jesus touched lepers, and other outcasts, and invited all to his table, and why he taught that we are to embrace those least considered worthy in our society: those in the human family who are hungry, feed them; who are strangers, welcome them; who are naked, clothe them; who are sick, heal them; who are in prison, visit them and aid in their liberation.

Jesus was an all-in-the-family man. Remember, his active ministry began with a family wedding feast, with much wine, and it ended as he gave instructions for the care of his mother as he hung on the cross. But he also radicalized the definition of the family beyond kinship, for all are made in the image of God just as was he.

As to salvation, which is our eternal worth as an individual, Jesus understood that comes about by ethical behavior, acts of goodness, and just and loving deeds, not through the correctness of one's doctrine.

On the path of salvation, he taught, one discovers the joy of one's own self-worth and the intrinsic worth of all others. It is clear that he applied the love of God equally and indiscriminately to all persons.

Nor was he interested in others so they would become his sheep, only that they realize they too were children of God – an equal part of God's family, with similar Divine DNA as was he.

Yes, God judges the religious life by the amount of love shared in it.

World Communion Sunday must expand for there are a host of religious bodies in the world, and we ought to find in each of them what we can to move the world forward as one human family. We need not give up on our own particularity, but we need to broaden it. We need to study and dialogue with others, not damn them. Yes, we will recognize our differences, but as family.

By the way, this is the mission of the Parliament of the World's Religion which meets around the world every five or so years. The gathered four months ago in Toronto, all ten thousand participants with delegates from 80 countries, representing 220 different Spiritual Paths.

The Parliament also co-sponsors with the United Nations and the official observance of World Interfaith Harmony Week, which is always on the first week in February, so, you see, we are in sync with the topic of this service.

But let me offer another Biblical passage from the prophet Micah's vision of the peaceable kingdom where all the nations, with their own religious views, gather together in Jerusalem and decide to:

*“beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war*

anymore; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees and no one shall make them afraid.”

There is a wonderful statue depicting this passage, a soldier beating his sword into a plowshare, in front of the United Nations in New York City.

And let us be thankful for both, the statue and especially the United Nations, whose Charter declares it exists “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.” The U. N. is surely a serious *political* recognition that we are One Human Family.

And notice Micah’s prophetic vision makes room for all peoples, to be safe sitting under their “*own vines and under their own fig trees.*” It is not a crusade seeking to convert everyone under one religious banner – only the need to come together in their common humanity for justice and mercy, tempered by a great deal of humility.

Nevertheless, no religious body should claim their way alone is favored by God or can claim the exclusive path to salvation, even though some may suggest such.

Yes, the alternative to religion will always remain a better religion, and a healthier religion will have tolerance in it. Tolerance may not be the final answer needed, but it is the first step.

Of course, there is evil in this world, but we are not called to divide people into good and evil but to overcome evil with good.

Still, let me add one other common dream of One Human Family and it is embedded in our own sacred scripture, our own Declaration of Independence. In it we made the pledge that we are all created equal, with unalienable rights, for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This great universal declaration “that all men are created equal” we now know needed more work. The word MEN proved insufficient, as it has throughout history, and needed amending to include all races, and all genders, and to have a universal application to all persons.

So, no matter how mean, angry, disunited our society has recently become, let us rejoice that the rather divine pronouncement that “all **persons** are created

equal” has never before look so good, or so legally supported, than it is today. It gives the One Human Family it’s just structure and it must not be reversed.

I recall an episode in a Presbyterian Church that I was the Pastor. A sharp debate arose when some of the members thought that the American flag which stood opposite the Christian flag in the sanctuary, ought to be removed because it conflicted with Jesus message, “that God’s house shall be a house of prayer for all the nations.” Others though that it falsely implied that we were a Christian Nation.

As you can imagine, a passionate argument, pro and con, were occurred. But after deliberation a compromise finally prevailed.

It was decided first the **Christian flag** should remain even though we often fall short of such a gracious identity. The **American flag** should also remain, since we were its citizens and are responsible for its general welfare. Then we decided that **United Nations Flag** should be included, for we are also citizens of the world and as Pablo Casals said, “The love of one’s country is a splendid thing, but why should love stop at the border.” Besides it would recognize all nations of The One Human Family. And then last we added, the **Rainbow flag**, certainly to welcome gays who have been tragically ostracized from the One Human Family, but also symbolically representing all people, no matter their color, country, or condition.

I must omit I have never been a great flag waver, even when I willing served in our country’s uniform. I suspect like many of you, I more often have had a lover’s quarrel with our country, arguing against it when wrong and applauding it when right. Patriotism, yes, Nationalism, no.

I liked the four-flag result because it led us to diversity and inclusion – to a greater embrace of life. And it also meant we finally got Jesus’ message right: God’s house shall be a house of prayer for all the people..

Back in Cincinnati we, with others of the larger community, began a new organization, which sought to bring gays and straights and really anybody together into one caring relationship. In fact, we decided to call it, “*The One Human Family*”. At its inaugural meeting, Don Beck, a gay architect, introduced it with these words.

“One Human Family is not about chest beating, it is about embracing. It is...about compassion and reasoned direction. It is not about division but about success through unity. It is about individual dignity and personal achievement. One Human Family will not tolerate diversity; we will celebrate it and Cincinnati is a great place to raise a family.”

Surely, “One Human Family” sounds a lot like your congregation, doesn’t it? Truly, here at Harbor U-U, unity and diversity are indeed celebrated. Your seven principles are surely a reflection that you lift up your life in the One Human Family and graciously so, and, yes, Muskegon a great place to raise a family!

I close with a word from a beloved member in our church in Cincinnati. Camilla Warrick was great newspaper writer and reporter. A Quaker growing up, and as such she joined our church because we had made it clear that all persons, what ever their faith, are invited to the communion table to partake of the bread and wine.. On one particular Sunday, when she assisted in the service, she gave the welcome and then added, **“Here at Mt Auburn -**

“We are female and male; we are variously gifted in mind and personality; we are fat and thin; we have big noses or small ears; gray hair, no-hair, yellow hair; we have tan skin, pink skin, brown skin, pale skin; we are children and adults; homosexuals, heterosexuals and persons in between. We are God’s good creation...and we all our equipped to dialogue with the Holy Spirit...and capable of more light and much love.” Welcome!

That’s a good place for me to end, praying before God for more light and much love. I can only offer a plea that whenever we engage others that we will remember we are of the same blood and they too are a special part of the One Human Family. Amen.

(Camilla Warrick, Elder and dear friend, died of cancer in her late 40’s in 2000. She was greatly love by all of Cincinnati.)

THE GOLDEN RULE OR LAW

Just a reminder: The Golden Rule or Law is embedded in all of the major religious bodies. While it does not describe all that must be taken into account regarding interpersonal relations, it dramatically points out the need to confront our radical self-centeredness which negates the rights and needs of others.

Judaism: What is harmful to yourself, do not to others. That is the whole of the Torah; the remainder is but commentary.

Christianity: All things, whatsoever you would that others should do to you, do you even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

Buddhism: Hurt not others with that which pains yourself.

Islam: No one of you is a believer until you love for everyone what you love for yourself.

Confucianism: Is there any one maxim which ought to be acted upon throughout one's whole life? Surely, do not unto others what you would not they should do unto you.

Hinduism: This the sum of duty: do naught to others which if done to you would cause you pain.

Jainism: We should regard all creatures as we regard our own self, and should therefore refrain from inflicting upon others, such injury as would appear undesirable to us if inflicted upon ourselves.

Sikhism: As you deem it for yourself, so deem it for others. Then you shall become a partner in heaven.

Taoism: Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain: and regard your neighbor's loss as your own loss.

Zoroastrianism: That nature only is good when it shall not do unto another whatever is not good for its own self.