

Centre Street Congregational Church, UCC
Machias, Maine

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Navel Gazing

Rev. Susie Maxwell

Let us pray . . .

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight oh
God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Umbilical cords.

Engaging with imagery is a significant part of my sermon writing.

God knows I was given an immense imagination, so finding an image
with which to work while reading sacred texts feels easy for me.

Umbilical cords.

That's what came to mind as I absorbed our lesson for this morning.

Joyce read the continuation from last week's Scripture which in its essence is about abiding, remaining, or staying with what Jesus taught us as a conduit to God. The language of abiding brings thoughts of intertwining and connection. Hence the umbilical cord — and well, it is Mothers' Day.

When my mother's days were down to less than a week, I helped care for her body.

I remember navel gazing.

Not the kind that means I'm self absorbed. The kind that means I was mesmerized by gazing at my mother's navel while lifting my shirt to push my thumb into my own belly button — imagining my umbilical cord once attached such a long time ago deep inside her 84 year old body.

I abided in her love for almost 60 years. And of course I still do.

But across the time we shared, she taught me some very important things that still abide in me like whenever you can, make a fuss over a stranger. You never know what's going on in their lives and they might need to know they matter.

And if you're short a piece of pie? You reassure everybody else that you are much too full for pie.

There were of course the traditions that abided deeply within her from her childhood — like hanging paper streamers and paper bells at Christmas and secretly saving up all the birthday cards that had arrived in the mail across the week in order to produce them to the birthday person on the morning of their big day!

Abide in me.

There is of course another side of the things that abide, stay and remain with us. And it doesn't often look good. It wasn't unusual for my

brother, sister or me to say something like, “Mom, you sure can hold a grudge. How old is this one? 57 years?” Keeping a wretched and meticulous score also abided in my mom because we don’t always get the connections right. As Lindsay said in her video, these connections are gifts *and* challenges, things we’ve received from things received before us. Things that we too, will pass on.

Umbilical cords.

Jesus understood connection more than anything else. And what he understood in particular was that there was an original constant, perfect and available source of love called God.

He had received and understood God’s perfect love. And he too wanted his followers to receive what he received. He too wanted to pass on the things of God — things like love, compassion, and mercy — so that they could be passed on in return.

In our lesson, Jesus reassures his disciples as to how he knows this by connecting the Divine Dots for them, telling them: *just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love* — meaning that because of and through his abiding, his remaining, his staying with *the* Source of love — God — that through his connection to God — through his umbilical cord of sorts — then in the same way they will abide in him. And of course, as believers, we too participate and abide in this connection.

What's important in this text is the command Jesus refers to, the command that is intimately connected to abiding with love. It's a command he tells his disciples — and us — to keep again and again, and that is that we *love one another*.

The distinction to begin with the source of love — God — is a critical and necessary one. Tracing ourselves back to God's love is as mysterious as tracing your umbilical cord back to your mother's, to her mother's, to her mother's and on and on an on. It's an impossible thing to track, so Jesus says

“Love one another,” do that and you'll abide in me.

Seems to me that love is some sort of Cosmic umbilical cord connecting us to the source of all life — our — shall we say, Original Mother, The Divine/The Holy.

Jesus' point was that we need a shared and original source of love that comes from outside of and beyond us, otherwise, our egos come in and hold grudges or tell Sarah and Maria that they are some how less worthy.

The importance of Jesus' teaching is that it orients and locates us *first* in God's love. And abiding in God's love gives us the strength, voice and

vision to help make things right — teaching by example and showing the world that God’s love knows no boundaries and is there for everyone to participate in equally, fully and abundantly.

Beloveds, to love one another *IS* to reveal that we abide in God’s love.

As this new week unfolds, my prayer for each of you is that you take some time to abide in some imagery:

Imagine a world where Sarah and Maria can freely move about without feeling frightened, rejected or somehow less than.

Imagine a world where we never cease to stop making connections back to our original knowledge and source of love — embodied and brought near through Jesus’ teachings — and made manifest in all that we do:

Whether through a piece of pie

A stack of birthday cards

Fussing over someone

Sharing the on-going work of social justice

Praying on behalf of another

Or trying our best to figure it out

Like motherhood or fatherhood or neighborhood — the work is never ending. Sometimes we'll get it wrong, sometimes we'll be too tired or hungry or self-absorbed. Sometimes we'll be too discouraged or frightened. Always we'll be human.

Cosmic umbilical cord. God must have somehow whispered that in Jesus' ear.

Abide in me.

People often ask me, where is God in this messed up world?

Jesus said, love one another, and there you'll find God abiding.

Amen