

“All the World Is Family”

Genesis 1:26-31

Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

August 30, 2020

READ Genesis 1:26-31

I begin with this text from the traditional, Old Testament “Creation Story”, not because I ascribe to the Creationist theory of the origin of human beings, which has Adam and Eve making an appearance many tens of thousands of years B.C.—Before Christ.

Rather, indeed, I ascribe to the theory of Evolution, which has my ancestors and yours walking upright, making tools, and building fires many millions of years ago, and thinking and behaving many hundreds of thousands of years ago, similar to how you and I think and behave today.

Either way—Creationist or Evolutionist—it is self-evident that “All the World is Family”—One Family. Either way, God is the Creator, and we human beings are made in God’s image. Either way, whether in a Garden of Eden, or in a landscape of caves, forests, and streams, these ancestors of ours gave rise to what is now, on this planet, seven million remarkably diverse images of one Divine Parent. I would like to think that this theme—that “All the world is family”—is what defines my life purpose. It is really the conviction on my part—“All the world is family”—that has driven my ministry of 50 years.

That, and Jesus. I cannot put it better than William Sloan Coffin, Yale Chaplain, Senior Minister of New York City’s Riverside Church, in his time America’s foremost conscientious agitator, my mentor and friend, in revealing why he became a minister: *“Jesus had me hooked. Never had I read or heard anyone who, from the outer periphery to the inner core and back again, was so totally of a piece. Jesus was tender as only the truly strong can be tender. He was in everyone’s corner, seeing through everyone and empowering them at the same time.”*

“All the world is family” has driven my ministry of 50 years, with Jesus in the passenger seat.

In those 50 years, the Family’s mix in the U.S. has changed significantly; White people were 88% of the population, but are now 72%. While Black and Native American percentages have stayed about the same, the Asian population has increased from less than 1% to nearly 5%, and the Hispanic population has grown dramatically from around 4% to over 16%. By the year 2050, the White population in the U.S. will be 47%--a minority.

The world’s Family will be growing, too, from 7 billion people today to 10 billion in 2050. Christians will increase from a little over 2 billion to a little less than 3 billion, but Muslims will possibly double to about 3 billion. Buddhists, Jews, and atheists will stay about the same percentages, but Hindus will grow by 34%.

In the 1970’s, my own family was pretty much the diversity in towns where I pastored, as we checked the White, Black, Asian, and Native American boxes. When we paraded through a restaurant for dinner, the quizzical stares were palpable. Each year, I wrote and directed a musical drama that church youth would perform. My young kids were center stage, of course, for the one I called—you guessed it--“All the World is Family”. The chief lyric in the title song was “All the world is family! You become my neighborhood, and God said ‘It is good!’” That play never made it to Broadway!

Over the years, my congregations welcomed and settled refugee families and individuals from Vietnam, Cambodia, Poland, Afghanistan, and Russia. Their range of experience has included everything that life in America offers: births, deaths, illnesses, graduations, marriages, divorces, employment, unemployment, business ownership. Many are fast friends of my family. The Russians arrived as a family of eight kids with Dad and Mom, and in time expanded to 13 kids. As Christians persecuted in their homeland, Dad and Mom no more practiced birth control than did Adam and Eve!

“All the world is family! You become my neighborhood, and God said ‘It is good!’”

Once, after waiting for the train to clear the station, the kids and I noticed that a woman who had just disembarked seemed very confused about her surroundings. I parked the car and approached to see if I could help her, communicating as best I could in my broken Spanish. The kids got a kick out of that, since they had soon realized that she spoke Polish! It did work out: We drove her to the station in the next town down the line, which is what she had intended.

“All the world is family! You become my neighborhood, and God said ‘It is good!’”

By the Grace of God, I have visited professionally or personally in 20% of our earth’s nations, and been welcomed warmly by sisters and brothers of the One Family: From the chaotic slums of Saigon to the quiet fjords of Norway; from the huts of the tribal Maasai in Tanzania to the sprawling refugee camp on the Jordan/Israel border; from the patients at the Christian hospital in India to the trafficked women finally secure inside the safe house in Tokyo; from the modest mosque beside the Nile to the dense barrios of Mindanao.

I met no criminals at the orphanage outside of Reynosa, across the Rio Grande from Texas—only abandoned children and their caretakers. I met no rapists in the remote village of Honduras—only farmworkers helping farmworkers rebuild their homes after Hurricane Mitch. I met no thugs in the jungles of Chiapas in southern Mexico—only Guatemalan men, women, and children seeking refuge from a war perpetrated in part by my government. Today, Armando, our ‘tree guy’, prefers not to talk about the war in which he was forced to fight.

“All the world is family! You become my neighborhood, and God said ‘It is good!’

Then I remember: that means the car owner who left the motor running and the music blaring across the parking lot while inside the bagel shop, is my cousin!

And I remember: that means the self-styled vigilante who killed a couple of people while ostensibly assisting the Kenosha police, is my cousin!

And I remember: that means the congresspersons who stand by alternative facts, and play loose with the truth, are my cousins!

“All the world is family! You become my neighborhood, and God said ‘It is good!’??

Yes, anecdotal evidence confirms... that it is good!

The 2020 Census survey acquaints me with Rachel, originally from El Salvador, who holds dual citizenship with her husband Marco.

The 2020 Census survey acquaints me with the Nguyen family, boat people escaping Vietnam at the same time that my friends the Tran family escaped Vietnam—on a different boat.

The 2020 Census survey acquaints me with Belen and Antonia, ethnic Ethiopians, and Festina and Alio, ethnic Ghanaians, and then I meet Deidra and her son Isaiah, adopted from South Africa.

And the Guptas, a Hindu family, live next door, on the north side of us, and the Weinbergs, a Jewish family, live next door, on the south side of us.

William Sloan Coffin, Yale Chaplain, Senior Minister of New York City’s Riverside Church, in his time America’s foremost conscientious agitators, my mentor and friend, ends his essay on why he became a minister the way I will end mine: *“I believe that as members of Christ’s church, Christians are brought together in one loaf to be broken to feed the world. I believe Christians could make an enormous difference in this world; and maybe, by God’s grace, even save it. The only question is whether we will.”*

“All the world is family! You become my neighborhood, and God said ‘It is good!’

