

BECOMING

Sermon by Jace Belz

10-23-2022

This morning I want to explore how we are shaped in becoming as unique individuals, in how we are becoming with God, and in how we see ourselves becoming in community.

We are complex human beings. When I think of the word “being”, though, I think of words like static, stationary, or non-moving. Wouldn't it make more sense if we were human becomings? Becoming makes me think of motion, fluidity, activity, and change. You see, you are a product of everything that surrounds you. Most of what you experience as you go about your daily life is barely in your conscious awareness. And yet, you are changing all the time by these interactions. You are influenced by nature, animals, community, socioeconomic status, the culture in which you were born and in which live, educational opportunities, and so forth.

You are also becoming who you are through viewing the internet and television. We are more connected, interconnected, than ever before in our history. Although, I would like to think that what shapes us the most is our everyday connections with each other.

Most likely, you entered church the same way I did today, walking in off the parking lot through the main doors. Perhaps you were greeted by David before you entered the sanctuary, as I was. His greeting and smile warm my heart and make me feel welcomed. It sets the tone of our worship experience. Once you walk past the threshold of the sanctuary, the greeting becomes a part of your past. It is no longer something in your immediate present, however, you carry that forward with you. After that experience you look the same on the outside but in the inside of you, you are ever so slightly different than you were when you first entered the church.

As you cross the threshold into the sanctuary, I'm pretty sure you were greeted with smiles of recognition and friendship, maybe even a few hugs – today I got the most wonderful smile from Ellen Wharrey and I could not help but exchange that smile.

When you take your seat, those exchanges also become part of your past. Sitting in the pew, you listen to the reading of the gospel, the sermon, the wonderful choir, and more. But, when you leave the service, it too becomes your past. You carry it with you. Well, you might forget some particulars but not the sermon, right?

If you could take a picture of all the moments just from this one morning, I bet you would be surprised at all the moments that made up your morning. You have probably seen those picture books where you flip through the pages and the scene develops. Each page has a slightly different picture. When you flip through it, it makes up a movie or you could say it makes up a lifetime. The individual pages stand alone as an event but each one before it is slightly different and each page is a new moment, where new decisions are made to go forward with the next event. You need the previous pages to lead you up to the new moment. I propose that this is how becoming happens. Each encounter, each person you connect with, or maybe it's a walk-in nature, or a greeting by your dog or cat, it changes you into a slightly different person. There is movement, action inside of you. I can't look at you and see what changed, but inside, you are becoming **an** ever so slightly different you from these experiences.

You are becoming. Constantly.

Fast forward though the day, and let's say you go to lunch with a friend and they ask you how your day was. You tell them about the greetings, the choir, and how meaningful it was to you. And why would your friend believe you? Because they have known you and they trust your perception to tell them the truth of how this affected you. You invite them to this experience. And in exchanging this with them, they too become part of your becoming experience. And you are a part of theirs.

This is what is happening in the Gospel reading today. In First John it says: **1** We announce to you what existed from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have seen and our hands handled, about the word of life. **3** What we have seen and heard, we also announce it to you so that you can have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. **4** We are writing these things so that our joy can be complete.

The person writing 1 John is explaining his experience to friends and strangers about God and Jesus Christ. He is saying “Friends, I have seen him, walked with him, broke bread with him. And by knowing me and by knowing my personal experience, you too can begin to know Jesus. I bring my becoming experience with me to share with you.”

I would guess that you too have experiences of who Jesus is and has been in your life. You too have built a relationship with God. Rabbi Shapiro says that we think about ourselves as too limited. He says we should open our minds and our experiences to expand how we think. We carry so much more than the experience of our current life. Think of how much you carry of the moments with your parents. They carry moments of their experiences with their parents, your grandparents, and so on. All of the past is carried in some form in you. Rabbi Shapiro says we carry with us experiences in some form going all the way back to the beginning of the universe! You carry the spark of God.

You are becoming in and with your relationship with God as you return to prayer. Every time we return to God in thoughts or prayer, we are becoming more – slightly changing in that relationship. Some of these moments are not easy and some moments are heartbreaking. That too is part of our becoming with God. Not every becoming moment is progress or positive. These moments are precious moments to take to God, to involve God in how our next moment will begin. God walks with us. God delights to hear from you. You build a past with God that stays with you and you also carry the next possibility of how you and God will move forward. God is the ultimate knowing of all and God holds all memory, nothing is lost in the Divine.

You each bring such richness with you to share as we gather here at Maple Grove in this community. Yes, this spiritual/religious community is also always becoming. We are shaped by each other through sharing our daily individual experiences and our life of experiences with God. We share a history of 100 years. All those moments of the past are carried with us and they have shaped our experiences up to this present moment whether we lived them or not.

Think of all the events and moments that have been shared here. It's more than we can comprehend. This community is just beginning a new century of events.

I wonder what future generations will say about our "becoming"? What history do we want to leave? What experiences of becoming will influence the direction we travel together? Each moment from this one is a new chance to participate in change or staying the same. God sees us as a potential for doing good but, we are the ones who must act on that.

I want to leave you with a few words from Diana Butler Bass. Her vision is one I share and maybe you do too? She said she longs for "a community where there is an intentionality, a dream, a disposition of the universe toward a table of openness and joy and equality and justice. A place where all are welcome and where every person is loved for exactly who they are and as they are. Where everyone is fed and everyone has a place at that table. Diana says "it is real, it is happening, we can participate in it and we can do this. Faith is to live in complete conviction that the healing, saving, making whole, loving, accepting, compassionate work of God is at hand and, she says, "we have a part in it".

So, I invite you to think of your wildest imagination of a loving community, and to think about it becoming real. Remember that each moment is a moment we make decisions with God to a new becoming for the future. What will your part be in the next moments to come?