

Over the past two weeks, we've engaged the books of *Genesis* and *Exodus*. Among their themes are creation, redemption, and liberation. We also find themes of alienation and disconnection.

At our core, we humans long for relationships of fulfillment – we want to be connected to one another, to the world around us, and to our Creator. We want to live in ways that bring out the very best of our unique gifts. We really do want to live like those first earth creatures in the garden.

Despite our best efforts, we still experience seasons of alienation and disconnectedness from one another, from the world around us, and even from our Creator. Sometimes this separation is a result of innocuous forces – time, distance, and space remove a closeness that once existed. Many of us have friends and relatives from childhood, or early adulthood, or other seasons of life who though still dear, no longer occupy a moment-to-moment closeness. Sometimes, we are wounded, and sometimes we wound others, and the space back to one another seems too great a journey to travel. Still other times, the volatility of our world – pandemics, climate crises, political turmoil, global conflicts – shakes us from a sense of connection. We feel paralyzed and overwhelmed, and it's hard to find belonging in all that dizziness.

The arc of the faith we proclaim is rooted in moving from spaces of alienation to spaces of connection. That is to say, we believe ours is a God of reconciliation. It's not just that we are loved and created by God, but we are pursued by God's love. God longs for our connectedness, and God endeavors to always work for that connectedness. We needn't wander in wilderness indefinitely.

I want to make something very clear. This table, the table God invites us to, is not about assigning blame, or taking responsibility, or meeting a requirement for sufficiency. It never has been, and it never will be.

You, me, everybody, each one of us, we are enough in God. This table is about being reconciled in the communion of God's enoughness.

If, as the scriptures tell us, this meal was a Passover seder that happened the evening before Jesus' arrest, trial, and death, then I am overwhelmed and overjoyed by the events of this meal together. And even more so that we maintain the ritual. Amid a tumultuous, mean-spirited, angry world, Jesus would not be swayed from the practice of intentional community. He was going to share his bread, and share his love, and share his presence, and share all that he had with his neighbors, regardless of how inconvenient that might be for the powers and principalities around him. In a world bent on demanding alienation, Jesus is bent on working for reconciliation.

Listen, we are in relationship with one another, and that means there will be seasons of both alienation and connectedness between us. There were many such seasons between Jesus and his disciples. Table is the enduring hope, and indeed the standing invitation, for humanity, universe, and Creator to be reconciled – that is, to close the gap between alienation and connectedness.

In the wilderness, the Israelites grumbled. Who wouldn't?!? Reconciling a brutal past with a peaceful future is never easy. And it's certainly not fast. Daily manna, an outdoor table, al fresco if you will, was hope for the journey.

And so it is with our own table. We join together, seeking what every human being needs: bread to sustain us, company to provoke and inspire us, rest to energize us. We also gather to acknowledge, with thanksgiving, the source of our provisions.

When Jesus invites us to the table, I believe Jesus offers both a certainty and a possibility.

Here's the certainty: This world, someday, somehow, and someday is going to be reconciled. God's goodness will be evident, abundant, and universally experienced in all creation. The whole family of creation is gonna dine at God's table. Every news outlet may keep burying this headline. It doesn't matter. The reality of God's reconciliation is breaking into this world.

Here's the possibility: When we come to the table, in the spirit of every table that has preceded us, be it in Sinai, Jerusalem, or Charlotte, we transcend space and time, and we find a place, where at least for a fleeting moment, we bridge the gap of alienation and connection. We find manna together. We are enough for ourselves and one another. We have enough for ourselves and one another. We have the chance to be agents in the reality of what will be. We have an opportunity to be reconciled right now.

Sardis Baptist Church, the long arc of the moral universe is bending toward justice, and love, and community, and hope, and light, and every imaginable and conceivable good thing. When we come to the table, we get to see and experience the bend.

Friends, God's certainty and God's possibility are here for you today and always. Amen.