

Come Together: “No”
Genesis 12:1-4a March 20, 2011

- I. “Come together.” “No!”
 - A. “Come on get it together.” “No!”
“Please sit up and eat your dinner.” “No!”
“Stop throwing your food on the floor.”
“No!”
“Come on – eat your peas.” “No!”
“Thou shalt not steal.” “No!”
“Thou shalt keep the sabbath.” “No!”
“Do not exceed the speed limit.” “No!”
 - B. All that bonding with Mom and Dad and all that wonderful, paradisiacal sense of unity with the cosmos, the sense of absolute dependency you have as a baby; as you quickly grow up -- that doesn’t last very long.

1. In a very short period of time a baby moves from that early paradise into a self-awareness; a sense of independence, a sense of their own will power, a sense of their own desires; a sense that is manifested in a toddler's first -- "NO!"
2. This is a movement from that innocent dependent bond that we find symbolized in the story of Adam and Eve before the fall, to the human developmental level of self awareness and independence that is seen in Adam and Eve's rebellion against God and their very first -- "No."
3. The story of Adam and Eve may have been an attempt to describe our species' early development, and at some point our species or an ancestor, did become self aware.

4. But their story is definitely an allegory for the development of every individual human being.
5. At a very early age, earlier than most parents are ready for, an infant declares their own self awareness and self identity and they let you know that they now have their own intentions and they tell you emphatically – “No!”
6. Whether from Adam and Eve or from a toddler it is all the same;
“No! I’m going to do what I want.
I’m going to eat the fruit and I’m going to have knowledge and I’m going to be my own person.
You can’t tell me what to do.”
Oops.
“**Bye bye, love.** Bye bye, sweet caress.
Hello, emptiness.
I feel like I could die. Bye bye, my love,
goodby-ye.”
7. Yup – no more paradise, but leaving that paradise is part of growing up.
Learning that we can tell our parents, or God – “No;” that is the end of paradise, but it is also the beginning of becoming who we are.
And as the story of Adam and Eve warns us, life doesn’t get any easier.
8. But as we find out with the rest of the story, growing up, separating ourselves from God,

or from our parents, is really the only way that we can really love them.

9. It's the ol' two edged sword thing.
We lose paradise, but we gain love.
What?
We gain love because we can't really love until we have become our own independent self and then freely choose to love.
The 'Yes' to God's love can really only come after our "No" that separates us from God and establishes our own self-identity.
10. God, like a parent, waits anxiously for that turning point, that repentance, when of their own individual free will the child will choose to love God.
11. But we're getting ahead of ourselves, we'll be there in a few weeks – right now we are still working on the separation – the "No."

II. With this new development God (for Adam and Eve) and parents (for a toddler) take on a new role or a couple of new roles.

A. God, like a toddlers parents, becomes the Great Other.

1. That paradisiacal unity is still cherished and desired;

but not at the expense of developing a separate identity and expressing free-will and self-determination.

2. God becomes the Great Other, a transcendent being.
Sometimes our nemesis; standing in the way of what we want.

B. The second new role is that God, like our parents, becomes the rule maker, the law giver, the one who sets our boundaries.

- a) It is God who gives us the commandments.
- b) It is our parents who give us the rules.

III. Whereas in our first stage of development we have the primal experience of being in the Womb of God and a primal sense of unity; it is at this second stage that we have a living experience that provides us with an image of God as other and in the role of parent.

A. For a toddler there really isn't any understanding of God, for them their parents are God.

- B. They are the supreme authority; The Great Other, the Rule-maker and Protector; and still embedded in the memory, and hopefully constantly reinforced, is the image of the source of love.
- C. As we get older and begin to have some understanding of God as a separate entity out there somewhere, this parental image is an image that we project upon God; it becomes the primary cookie-cutter image through which we imagine God.
- D. And in a time of patriarchal control of language, thought, religion and culture that has dominated humanity over the past 5000 years; this ultimately powerful image becomes --- Our Father.
- E. Historically, psychologically and theologically we moved from the all encompassing compassion of the Womb of God to being obedient to God the Father.
Compassion / obedience
Mother / Father.

- F. Oh, but then Jesus does a really interesting thing with this -- he puts the two together when he tells us that we should be **compassionate as God is compassionate.** Luke 6:36 Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, HarperSanFrancisco, © 1994, p. 46
- G. Talk about mixing your metaphors.
- H. Compassion refers to the Womb love; the loving bond between a mother and the one in her womb.
And so while Jesus refers to God as Father he also tell us to have womb love for one another just as God has motherly womb love for us.

- I. In any case, for much of our younger life and until we are able to deal more effectively with abstractions, this is our image of God – God as parent; an image that we first began to develop as a toddler.
- IV. But let's get back to the toddler, because this little guy or girl is busy; busy, busy, busy.
- This little one is busy moving away from the comfortable confines of their parents and moving into new worlds they are discovering.
- A. As a parent this is a time that is a little scary, because their little baby is developing a mind of their own.

Along with this they are becoming mobile and just like Abraham in our scripture this morning being urged by God to move to a new home, a new world; the toddler is starting to move out into the world and give up security for adventure. And after all what beaming parent isn't proud to hear them speak and see them take that first step.

Like God to Abraham, a good parent will encourage the toddler to move about and develop their own world.

- B. But, it's one of those "for better or worse" kind of things; because it's the beginning of a parent losing control.

- C. For our daughter Annie, while she was a toddler, right after “No.” came her favorite phrase, “Me do it.”
“Me do it.”
And I promise you it is still her motto.
- D. Our separation from our parents is the beginning of our own self-identity; just as our separation from God is the beginning of our own spiritual self identity.
- E. But the flip-side is that it is also the beginning of our sinfulness and our rebellion against God and the existential anxiety that comes from our separation from God.
You can't avoid it.
It is the human condition and it is a tension that exists in our lives until we die.

- F. It is why Jesus' stories of the Prodigal son, or the lost sheep, or the lost coin are so comforting and meaningful to us; because those teachings of Jesus reassure us that even though at one level we have separated ourselves from God, at a deeper level – nothing can separate us from God.
1. God will welcome us with open arms, when of our own free will we choose to love God.
 2. God will continue to keep trying to get us to make that turn in life back towards God.
- G. Hopefully, we grow up and we begin to see that the rules God has given us; the boundaries that God has set for us; are not some kind of punishment, or some neurotic divine need to control us. But rather, like a loving parent those rules and boundaries have been put there to keep us safe, help us grow and to guide us towards a life that is filled with love.
- V. Abraham and his family couldn't grow until they were willing and able to leave behind their old comfortable home, the land that they knew, the occupations they knew, the friends they knew, the

language and culture they knew.

To become what God had intended, they had to leave the comfortable bond and set themselves apart and become their own people.

A. We too as a toddler have to make that separation from our comfortable bond; but if we do it right, like Abraham we won't forget the source of our life and our love and we will remember that womb love.

B. We will keep our connection to God.

VI. Too late for all of us though.

We've been there, done that – right?

Or have we?

A. Aren't we all still toddlers?

1. Don't we still rebel against God?

2. Don't we still say, "Me do it."

3. Don't we still at times ignore God's prodding?

4. Don't we still forget that we are swimming in the womb of God?

B. That tension of separation from God that comes with our declaration of "NO" and

then the need for reconciliation and redemption; that is still part of our never ending story.

VII. And for those of you with toddlers, be in awe at the profound event that is taking place; and deep inside rejoice when that little one looks you square in the eye and says, "NO."

Because it is only after the "No" that someday, of their own free will they will turn back to you and out of love say "YES."

AMEN.