This morning I’m continuing with the sermon series based on the book Slow Church. The title Slow Church is a riff on the Slow Food movement which, unlike fast food, provides locally and sustainably sourced food. Today when we talk about whole food we think of the grocery chain, but before that, whole foods referred to food which was un-processed and often organically and locally produced. Today we’ll be thinking about wholeness in the life of the faith community.

Wholeness is when everything in an eco-system is functioning at its best. There isn’t too much of anything and everything is working well. Most of us know what that feels like in our bodies. Most of us have had times when everything was working well and at its best. We were whole. Healing is the process of restoring that balance. There is a very close relationship between wholeness and healing.

We might think of wholeness as being God’s dream; God’s dream to bring all things into reconciliation with Godself and thereby into reconciliation with each other.

It’s quite clear when we look around us that we have a long way to go. Our society is divided by all kinds of barriers. We separate ourselves from each other by engaging in racism; by thinking ourselves superior to other groups, including other Christians; by favoring others who are like us educationally and economically; and of course despising those whose political beliefs are different from ours. These divisions within society often continue here within the church because we are not fully conscious of the choices we make. During coffee hour, when we choose to pick up conversations with those we know best because its easiest and it’s good to see our friends we unconsciously deepen the gap between ourselves and those we don’t know so well. When we are looking for people to help us with a project or to pray with us we tend to ask the people we know, not those who we don’t yet know so well. This can lead to an unconscious cliquey-ness.

Since we are the people of God and wholeness is the dream of God, it is our calling to work to heal all those divisions, to take the risk to start and develop conversations with those we don’t find so easy, with those who seem to be quite different from us and those we simply don’t know yet. In this morning’s gospel, Jesus said “you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” This is a picture of wholeness, of oneness in community. We are all members of the Body of Christ. We are in Christ and Christ is in us, and since Christ is in the Creator, we too are one with God.

Yet we are still part of creation. And as humans we have separated ourselves from the planet, using her resources without awareness of what we are taking. But those days are largely past. Now we do have awareness. Now we know that our lifestyle is unsustainable. Now we know that Americans use far more than their fair share of the world’s resources. And now that we know, it is our responsibility to do something about it. It is our responsibility to reduce our own consumption of resources and to use our democratic system to ensure that we as a society choose to live more simply. Wholeness means living in right relationship with God, with each other and with our planet.

In fact, wholeness is what it’s all about.

Since the beginning when the Spirit hovered on the deep and brought forth the ever-expanding universe, matter has been separating into smaller and more complex units. It is God’s dream that all will be brought into a new relationship, one which is filled with the beauty and light and love that is God. This will be the new creation, the reconciliation of the world in Christ who is the alpha and omega – the A to Z of the universe – our beginning and our end.

Wholeness does not require that we give up our individuality and become just a drop in the ocean of life, but it does ask us to let go of our ego attachment to being the center of everything. Because it is God’s love, forgiveness and compassion which bring everything into wholeness. For us, the cross and resurrection are the ultimate symbols of that love and forgiveness. When we gather together for the eucharist and we re-member Christ coming among us and being lifted up on the cross in human agony and giving his life for us, which we symbolically take into our own bodies, making us one with the Christ – him in us and we in him… when we do that we are ritually enacting the healing of the universe – the wholeness of Christ being manifest in our circle.

But our remembrance and our worship are empty if they only symbolically and ritually speak of the wholeness that is God’s dream. In one of our Eucharistic prayers we pray, “Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this table for solace only and not for strength; for pardon only and not for renewal.” We gather to worship and serve God in this mystical meal which brings healing far beyond our small circle, but if we leave it at that we have missed the point.

For it is us, the church, whom God has appointed for the healing of the universe. Not the institution which we have created but the Jesus movement it serves. In God’s wisdom she has called first Israel and now the Church to be her people. It is God’s dream that we will be a people who serve the world around us and in so doing call all beings into reconciliation, into wholeness with each other and with God, in and through the Christ.

Gathered here this morning, we are in God’s dream. We, the people of St. Benedict’s, are called to live God’s dream in this community. We are called to bring healing and reconciliation not just here in the circle of our worship but in every relationship we have. We are called, like Jesus, to connect with those living on the margins and to bring them into community, to work for the reign of God, for heaven here on earth. Because each one is God’s beloved and each one deserves a fair and just society.

Let’s take a moment or two now to look at the people sitting across from you, the people sitting near you, and as you do so, say in your mind, “You are God’s beloved” - acknowledge each one as God’s beloved, as part of God’s dream for the redemption of the world.

…

God’s dream is for all people, indeed for all of creation to know that it is God’s beloved. God’s dream is for all things to come into right relationship and find their place in Christ. We are part of that dream. I invite you now to think about what God dreams for St Benedict’s. Let’s take some time to sit quietly and listen for the words that the Spirit gives to us. What is God’s dream for St Benedict’s?

…

When you have an idea, an inkling, a picture, please write it or draw it on the card you were given, even if it seems outrageous or just plain silly. There are pencils in the pews.

In a moment I’ll ask the ushers to collect your cards so we can together offer them to God, and we will be putting them up on the wall for everyone to see, but first would anyone like to share what you heard in God’s dream for us?

…

For us the cross is a symbol of the pain that is an integral part of life in this Creation and the love of God in sharing that pain and the agony of separation. It is also a symbol of forgiveness and reconciliation – Jesus forgave those who crucified him and by his resurrection showed us that the violence which underlies human culture is not all-powerful; it cannot stand against the power of love.

God’s dream is for us to release the violence and judgments which we hold in our hearts and replace them with forgiveness, compassion and a new daring to cross traditional boundaries and reach out to God’s beloved. God’s dream is for us to realize the power of love and to build the beloved community here in this place.