

A while ago, I heard an episode of On Being with Krista Tippett called “The Intelligence of All Kinds of Life” with botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer.¹ I found it so beautiful and compelling that 18 months later I am still savoring the images, feelings, and ideas it evoked. One of those was the idea that we in the church might listen to the story of the mosses – what they might tell us about how to live – about how not just to survive, but to flourish. Yes, I mean those flowerless plants that blanket many a forest floor. Perhaps, I’ve been thinking, we should become like moss.

According to Kimmerer, “Mosses have, in the ecological sense, very low competitive ability, because they’re small, because they don’t grab resources very efficiently, and so this means that they have to live in the interstices. They have to live in places where the dominant competitive plants can’t live. But the way that they do this really brings into question the whole premise that competition is what really structures biological evolution and biological success. Because mosses are not good competitors at all, and yet they are the oldest plants on the planet. They have persisted here for 350 million years. They ought to be doing something right here. And one of those somethings...” Kimmerer says, “has to do with their ability to cooperate with one another, to share the limited resources that they have, to really give more than they take. Mosses build soil, they purify water, they are like the coral reefs of the forest, they make homes for this myriad of all these very cool little invertebrates who live in there. They are just engines of biodiversity. They do all of these things, and yet, they’re only a centimeter tall.”

Mosses are, it turns out, among the most ancient and successful species on the planet, inhabiting almost every ecosystem on earth. They have the ability to clone themselves from fragments and thrive by inhabiting the interstices. They cooperate for resources, work with natural processes, and are absolutely integral to the vital functioning of the ecosystems in which they live. I find this entirely consistent with the movement Jesus calls us into as Christians. We are called to be deeply rooted in our contexts, collaborative, resourceful, generative, and essential. So there you have it – the church and moss.

But the idea I want to hone in on today has to do with what it might mean for the church to inhabit the interstices – the cracks and crevices, the gaps and in between places and spaces of the world, and that takes us to one of our readings for today, Moses encounter with God in the wilderness.

You may recall from last week that, while wondering around in the wilderness after having been freed from slavery in Egypt, Moses had left the Israelites to go be with God on the mountain top and was gone for 40 days, leaving them to wonder what had happened to both God and Moses. And in that intervening time, out of fear, desperation, or boredom, they turned to Aaron to replace their God for something they could see and touch – something they could be certain wasn’t going anywhere.

So Aaron made a metal image of a bull calf out of all their gold jewelry for them to worship – and what a magnificent golden calf it was – so they celebrated with a loud and raucous party – a party so boisterous that Moses could hear it from the distance as he made his way down the mountain back to his people.

When he got there, he was furious. He shattered the tablets, melted the calf, ground it into a fine powder that he mixed with water, forced the Israelites to drink it and then sent the Levites on a rampage through the camp to teach them the lesson of their terrible sin. Talk about interstices – all that happened between the lesson we read last week and the passage we heard today.

Well, when he was done with all that, he went back to Lord to try to broker a deal to re-establish the seemingly severed-beyond-all-recognition relationship between God and God’s chosen people, the Israelites.

It is in that encounter that Moses, perhaps a little too boldly, seeks not only reassurance of God’s ongoing presence with them, but a deepening of God’s divine revelation, a deeper knowing, a deeper disclosure of the essence of God. God responds with a reminder that while Moses, and by extension, the Israelites might not see the depths of God’s being – can’t see the depths of God’s being for it would be too much for them, they will continue to know God’s glorious presence in the wake of the goodness and kindness and compassion and mercy that has been and forever will be showered upon them, a promise and a revealing that God enacted by setting Moses in a gap in the rock – in a crevice – while God passed by in all God’s resplendent glory.

In that small space, God promised Moses that God’s goodness and kindness and compassion and mercy could and would be known in the interstices – in the cracks and crevices, gaps and in between places and spaces of their lives. In the space between slavery in Egypt and freedom in the promised land, in the space between hunger and fullness, homelessness and

homecoming, oppression and liberation, violence and peace, abandonment and communion, alienation and belonging. God could and would be known in the interstices. This was a promise God sealed again in and through the person of Jesus. In the space between the cross and the empty tomb, the space between Christ that was and is and the Christ that is to come, God’s goodness and kindness, compassion and mercy could and would be known.

Where are the cracks and crevices in your life and the lives of your loved ones? In your neighborhood, in our community, in Richmond, and beyond? God’s promise is that we are not alone, and we have more than each other. We have the promise of God’s best – God’s goodness and kindness, compassion and mercy.

And what’s more, we are called to bear that promise in our bodies, bringing God’s goodness and kindness, compassion and mercy to all those cracks and crevices, gaps and in between places and spaces our neighborhoods, our communities and beyond. We are called to inhabit the interstices – to be church that God calls us to be – showing that God’s promise is true – we are not alone – by sharing the love and light that shines in the wake of God’s presence in all the broken places of the world.

Over the last few days, there has been a story circulating about a team of firefighters from American Samoa who have been battling the wildfires raging in Northern California.² This team of special forces trained specifically to respond to fires in remote regions with some of the toughest terrain was found to be singing as they made their way through the forest. These men were singing a cappella in their native tongue at the top of their lungs – a hymn of thanks and praise to God. There they were, standing in the space between life and death, giving thanks and singing God’s praises. It seems to me they know something of what it means to inhabit the interstices – to bear the love and light that shines in the wake of God’s presence in the broken places of the world, proclaiming that the promise of God is true – You are not alone.

Let’s join them in this – in being the church of the interstices – showing the world that God’s promises are true. That we are not alone, and we all live in the wake of God’s goodness and kindness, compassion and mercy and love.

¹ Robin Wall Kimmerer. “The Intelligence in All Kinds of Life.” On Being with Krista Tippett. February 25, 2016.

² <http://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/story/36619419/samoan-firefighters-sing-moving-hymn-in-midst-of-california-wildfires#.Web1AtTVBpV.facebook>