

“In My Mother’s Womb”

Micah 4:1-4

Psalms 139:13-18

I rarely repeat an old sermon. When I do, I let you know because it’s obvious. When I saw that Psalm 139 was the assigned Psalm for this weekend and that we'd be baptizing Alexandria, I remembered a sermon I wrote after Micah was born 17 ½ years ago during our last year in Fargo, N.D. It’s one of my favorites entitled “In My Mother’s Womb”.

Where is there life without relationship? I suppose the one eternal God once dwelt in an absolute nothingness - without relationship. But in the instant when something began to exist besides God Alone, God became the Creator, and creation itself was never alone, therefore -was from the beginning related to its Creator.

God can. We can't.

For where is there life and not relationship?

The baby is conceived in relationship. Relationship prepares for its becoming. The intimate relationship of a man and a woman causes it to be. And tiny one cell, tiny two cells, this "self" begins and this being continues only so long as it finds a sweet, sustaining relationship within the womb of another.

The baby relationship may grow in hiding a while, its mother unconscious that company sleeps in her living room. But only for a while. The physical relationship develops, and the mother's body signals change. Soon she experiences a host of emotions not only regarding her

"condition", her singular self, but also regarding this "other" within her. Now there are two. Now there is a conscious relationship. And now, if all is well, even now in pregnancy, a woman loves a baby, and in such love is life indeed.

"Doug, look! Look at this!"

Danette is lying on her back in our king-size waterbed. Her womb is an island emergent, round, white and skin drawn tight. Her head propped up under two pillows, she smiles at the round mountain that is herself but not herself alone.

She has spread her hands on either side of her great stomach - massaging, touching. There is awe in her gesture.

"Look," she whispers.

Suddenly, I see a bulge on the right side. While I watch, it moves. Danette is smiling, giggling, and asking, "Do you see it?"

"Yes, I see it."

"This baby is really a kicker. That must be her foot."

"Danette," I say, "It must be his foot."

The bulge withdraws.

"Danette, did that hurt?" "No."

The tears in the corners of her eyes are not from pain but from the love she feels for the baby inside her.

It hasn't a name. But it has place and love already. It has relationship so strong that this woman's heart would out dare all dangers to save it. This woman's heart already holds it dear. It has life!

The baby's mother's is the more intimate relationship. The baby's father's relationship is obvious. But Mom and Dad are not the only relationships the baby has.

Psalm 139:13-18 -- For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. ¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed. ¹⁷How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! ¹⁸I try to count them — they are more than the sand; I come to the end — I am still with you.

"For it was you who formed my inward parts," says the psalmist. "You knit me together in my mother's womb." Here is the third of three who, in relationship, cause a baby to be: the Creator. God.

Where is there life in a perfect isolation, apart from relationship?

Life is caused and sustained in relationship with God, Creator, Sustainer - and finally his son, the Savior too. This is basic.

But life below the heavens, within creation is a maze of many relationships. No single thing can grow or flourish or know itself apart from other things. Nothing, says the psalmist, is created for itself alone. Everything is created for the sake of something else. The psalmist writes, "You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to cultivate, that they may bring forth food from the earth."

Plants for people. People for plants. A simple equation. Break it and both die.

So the baby is born. He's a little Adam relating to nature, breathing in the air the plants breathed out. Nature feeds him and keeps him whom God commissions one day to "dress and till and keep" her in return. Little Adam, little Micah, little preacher, little long jumper, something.

The baby is born, a tiny Micah now brought into a new relationship with another human being, receiving the hugs of his mother, bone of her bone, flesh of her flesh. Immediately there is the benefit of community, parental first, social soon after. Adam and Eve each need the other as deeply as people and plants do, helps "fit" for one another, folks who find themselves in the faces of the other. This is life: relationship.

The baby is born. Two hours after arriving at the hospital, the midwife asked, "Dad, would you like to see the baby's head?"

I looked. I had been holding Danette's head and shoulders forward with my right arm as she crunched to push with the mighty contractions. I withdrew my arm and leaned over her to look. The crown was there. The baby's head. The baby's wet hair. No, it didn't look very pretty.

"Yes," I said, "I see it."

Danette strained until she was exhausted. She worked so hard.

Finally the midwife said, "We'll do an episiotomy." I'd watched the process twice before but still was anxious as her blood was spilled once more.

"Here it comes!"

On that push the head popped out and it immediately began crying even with the rest of it still inside. One more push and he slipped into the skilled hands of the midwife, blue, smeared, glistening, crying. Immediately the midwife raised it up in a sweeping circle over its mother, aspirating the nose and mouth so swiftly, so skillfully, holding the child face upward, aloft.

Still out of breath but full of joy, Danette's first words, "Is it a boy or girl?"

The midwife looked across her to me, still holding the baby aloft, smiling and asking, "Well, Dad, is it a boy or girl?"

I bent over to look underneath the elevated baby and there was no mistake, it was a boy. I looked back up the bed to Danette, smiling, "It's a boy."

The midwife, Terry, now handed him to the nurse, Gail, who lowered him onto Danette's chest. Terry handed me the scissors and held the cord as I cut through it.

In those few moments his relationships and his life has radically changed. For until this instant his life was experienced in such close relationship to mother that he had only to move to feel it, feel the walls of the womb that embraced him. And all sound must have been muffled by

those walls, except the ordering, comforting beat of the heart-drum above. And the temperature had been temperate, and light was softened, and motion was rather like rocking.

All at once his body is assaulted. He discovers his nostrils by jabbing in them. He feels chill wind on his skin. The light crashes his eyes. The sounds are hard and foreign.

The life that began nine months ago in conceptual relationship, apart from his own choosing, has just been shocked - not just by the world, but also by selfness. Some deep part of the baby begins dimly to know that he is here, he is alive, he is.

As he settles in to mother's bosom, he closes his eyes. Being is just too much to consider just now. He sleeps.

But we look at one another, Danette and I, and together we open relationship unto him. We receive him. And within the trust and structure of our relationship we give him his identity: "Micah," we whisper. "His name will be Micah Allen." And then to signal commitment of family, the place wherein his ego will grow, the people from whom he takes his potential, his person, and his character, we give him our name as well: "Gunkelman," we murmur. Micah Allen Gunkelman. Our thirdborn.

Where is there life and not relationship? Nowhere. Which is why, when any important relationship breaks, it is suffered as death. And why, when it is renewed, we know it as resurrection.

Our relationship with God was broken. We were a disobedient and rebellious people who would rather kill one another than love one another. God sent his prophets of the Old

Testament to confront our broken relationships with one another and with him. To confront us and to give us new vision and new hope.

Micah was one such prophet. Micah 4:1-4 -- In days to come the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, ²and many nations shall come and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ³He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; ⁴but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

God sent his Son into the world to show us the Way of loving one another, forgiving one another, to not learn war anymore. As Alexandria is baptized, as Alexandria becomes one of God's children, I pray that God would use us to raise her up to confront the old and give visions of the new.

Micah 6:8 "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

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