

I Love You to the Moon and Back

Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a

September 12, 2021 – Center Harbor Congregational Church, UCC

Rev. Dr. Cathryn Turrentine

The children got straight up scripture this morning, but the grown-ups get a children's bedtime story: the classic *I Love You to the Moon and Back*, by Amelia Hepworth. The illustrations show a big bear and a baby bear going through their day. I bet some of you have read this to your own children or grandchildren. Listen now to hear the word that God can speak to us through this story:

I love our time together as we start each happy day. I love our bath time silliness – the way we splash and play! I love to lift you way up high so you feel really tall! We'll climb the highest mountaintops – hold tight and you won't fall. I love to share the magic of the shining skies above, and think of all the different ways that we can show our love... like when we're touching noses, playing chase, or seeing friends, our love is always with us and it never, ever ends. So, snuggle safely in my arms; our day is nearly done. I love you to the moon and stars, my precious little one.

I love you to the moon and back. That beautiful phrase speaks to the vast love of a parent for a child. How far away is the moon? My love for you is even bigger than that! The bears go through their day, climbing mountains, splashing in streams, looking at the moon and stars, and everything they see is a reminder to that little bear of how much they are loved. Smaller, more personal things are reminders of love, too: playing together, touching noses, visiting friends. And, oh! That snuggle at the end of the day! When that big furry arm wraps around that little bear, that is perfect security. All is right with the world.

You know the child who sits in Nana's lap to read this story feels just like that little bear – perfectly loved, perfectly cared for, perfectly protected. The world is a safe place for her, too, because of this security, this certain knowledge that all her needs are met, and that the love that is the source of her security – that love will never end. She can't say those words, of course, but if that love is there as she reads this book, she will feel it. I love you to the moon and back.

The Creation story that we heard a moment ago in the children's sermon is this same kind of love story for all of us. How much does God love us? God created the whole world; the day and the night; the sky; the sun, moon, and stars; all the plants and all the animals we could ever imagine or need in all our lives! And last, God created us, made in God's own image, all of us carrying that divine spark from the beginning of the universe. Male and female, created in God's image. Young and old, created in God's image. Gay and straight, created in God's image. Every race, every nation, every religion, all those people created in God's image. Strong and weak, all somehow very much like God. Those who are lithe and those who are full-bodied, we are all made in God's image, just as we are, right now. No matter if we are successful in the eyes of the world or if it sometimes seems we can't lay up a dime, no matter who we are, we are created in God's image, and we live in the light of God's love.

The Creation story was never intended to be a statement of historical facts about the origins of the universe. It is a poem, written for the people of Israel who were sitting in Babylon in exile, wondering if God still loved them, wondering if they would ever have a future as God's people. This poem, this song, was written to remind them that God has them in the palm of God's hand, in good times and in bad. You

can trust your future to God, this poem says, because God has been with you from the beginning of time. Look – God created the whole universe! God can handle whatever problems come your way. God has not forgotten you, could never forget you, for you are made in God’s own image.

This fall we will hear several Hebrew Scripture passages about the ways God provides for us. So, it is fitting to begin here: God has given us the whole world, the sun, moon, and stars, and everything we need to thrive. God has given us life itself. God has given us our identities as children of God. What else could we possibly need?

How much does God love us? God love us from the beginning of time, from one end of the cosmos to the other, in our most precious moments and our grandest dreams. God loves us to the moon and back!

Thanks be to God!

Amen