

Now That's a Cool Cloud!
[Hebrews Chapters 11 and 12]

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At last Saturday's Fall Retreat, Evie Novak suggested that we go around the table and say a few words about some of the departed members of BUCC who touched and inspired our lives and our faith. Some of the people who were remembered were unfamiliar to some of us newer members. Nevertheless, all of us were inspired by stories of their faithfulness and friendliness, their kindness and compassion, their deep wisdom and their delightful wit. What I found equally inspiring, was realizing that the members who shared these people's stories, also share those same wonderful qualities and gifts. So, while all of us may not know those past members directly, the enduring impact of their faithful lives continues to unfold - in this present moment, and for generations to come!

In today's New Testament reading, the author of *Hebrews* reminds a scattered community of believers [and us] of the unshakable bond we have with *all* of God's children. From Noah to Abraham to Moses through the Prophets, the author traces that continuous stream of faithful people, whose lives help shape our lives and our faith. And in those times when you and I feel that our lives or our faith are being tried and tested, these particular words can be extremely helpful: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every burden, fear and evil that would linger around us, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith...."

One of the great remedies for feeling isolated from others, or separated from our Divine Source, is to remember those people who persevered in their faith, and who helped prepare the path for our own faith journeys. And while we may not feel a particularly strong connection with Moses or Noah or the prophets of old, we can certainly feel the ongoing influence of those departed members of our own families, and of our Family of Faith. The author of *Hebrews* refers to this as “a great cloud of witnesses” which surrounds and sustains us - unhindered by time or space. And while the idea of an Eternal, Living Link with those who have departed may seem farfetched to the modern skeptical mind, those of us who experience it, find it both reasonable and tremendously reassuring.

For me, what *really* seems farfetched, are the “miracles” of modern technology. I’ll admit, that when it comes to understanding technological advances, I am slower than a rotary telephone. [If you don’t know what that is, ask your grandparents!] It’s not that I’m averse to all this slick new stuff; it just doesn’t excite me. Now I am a bit intrigued with this phenomena called “The Cloud” - a vast series of systems which essentially integrates every computer, tablet, smart phone, and electronic communication device around the globe. Apparently, this Great Cloud is capable of storing virtually unlimited documents, pictures, videos, books, music - billions of bits of personal information and memories - all of which is readily available for immediate access. Now I realize this may sound like some new-fangled, farfetched, sci-fi fantasy; but it actually exists! And if this human-made *electronic* connection isn’t mind-blowing enough, scientists have discovered that all human beings share a 99.9% genetic connection - indicating that we all have an unbreakable *organic* link; one which supercedes the boundaries of culture and race, time and distance!

All of this new-fangled scienc-y stuff is just beginning to scratch the surface of how knowledge and memory, personal data and characteristics can be compiled and stored and sustained. This may mean, that we humans are beginning to catch a faint glimpse of a profound and eternal Truth. This may mean, that science and

technology - rather than “disproving” God, are finally beginning to catch-up with a Divine Reality that people of faith have suspected and pointed to for centuries.

When the ancient Israelites refer to God as “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” they’re talking about an all-encompassing, Living Being - One who was, and is, and will always be. And they believed that within this Ever-living, Ever-loving Presence, the essence of all those who proceeded them is also present; and that all which is good and kind and loving, is contained and carried forward by that Presence. they also believed that qualities which are *not* good or kind or loving, would be deleted; or that those corrupt files would somehow be reformatted and restored. [That’s not exactly how the ancients expressed it; but maybe they were on to something with their understanding of human sin and brokenness, and Divine redemption and grace!]

Because of the limitations of language, finding ways to express the Magnificent Mystery of Life’s origin, condition, and continuum has always been difficult. This is why it is wrapped in sacred stories, or wrapped in swaddling cloths, and laid in a manger: so that the Truth can develop and grow and emerge, as it lives and moves among us and within us. It’s like the Original Source of Everything blasted the seeds of Life and Knowledge and Wisdom throughout an expanding Cosmos, where they could continually spring-forth in new and creative ways. And maybe it’s because of an innate intuition of this Divine Cosmic Connection, that people of faith are inspired to be connected and compassionate.

On this All Saints Sunday, you and I celebrate a Divinely Creative and Connecting Presence - One which transcends any differences or distances which might separate us. Today we remember Jesus Christ - that unifying figure who embodies that continuing connection and compassion. We also remember our faithful friends and family members, whose lives and love touch and shape our own. This morning, through our eating and drinking together; and by joining our hands in one great circle of blessing, we remember that we are a part

of that “great cloud of witnesses!” And while all this may sound rather complicated, our “witness” is really quite simple:

Welcome all people; care for them; feed them at this Table, and throughout the world. Then we will be ready to share with them those wonderful stories of Divine love and grace, which others have joyfully shared with us!