

“These Lives are Precious”

A worship service by Pastor Steve E-M
for FUMC Grand Junction, Sunday, January 8, 2023
The First Sunday in Epiphany 2023

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ
website: <https://www.fumcgj.org>;

Scroll down to the Church Online panel and
click the **Digital Worship Archive** button.

Scripture Reading for the Day:

✠ Psalm 72:1-2, 4, 6-7, 12-15a [NLT]

OPENING

- Over the week of Christmas break, I was introduced by one of my family members to an author of uncommon depth whose name is Robin Wall Kimmerer.

On her website, Kimmerer is described as “a mother, scientist, decorated professor, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation” – a Native American tribe headquartered in Oklahoma but with historical roots in the Great Lakes area.

The book that was recommended to me, written by Robin Wall Kimmerer, is called *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

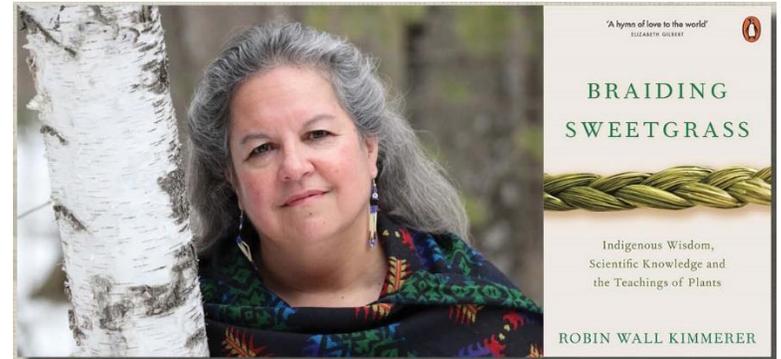
Of Kimmerer, journalist and fellow-author Elizabeth Gilbert wrote:

“Robin Wall Kimmerer is a writer of rare grace. She writes about the natural world from a place of such abundant passion that one can never quite see the world in the same way after having

seen it through Kimmerer’s eyes. In Braiding Sweetgrass, she takes us on a journey that is every bit as mythic as it is scientific, as sacred as it is historical, as clever as it is wise. She is a great teacher, and her words are a hymn of love to the world.”

— Elizabeth Gilbert

[Source: <https://www.robinwallkimmerer.com/>]



The subtitle of this exquisite book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, is “Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants”.

I bring this up because of its completely unexpected connection to a beautifully simple song that is part of today’s theme, “These Lives are Precious”.

When we hear that – “These Lives are Precious” – we naturally think of human life. But notice in this music video the way that *human dynamics* and *God’s love for human life* are depicted in the non-human, yet very much alive, plant world.

(*Music video from *Worship Design Studio*...*)

- Oftentimes, metaphor speaks more powerfully than direct address.

TO THE SCRIPTURES

- As Debbie Beth/Amy said earlier, we don't live in a world ruled by kings, so it would be easy to dismiss the reading as having little to say to us, belonging as it does, on the surface anyway, to an age long gone by. But in Psalm 72, in appealing to God for the life and reign of the king, the psalmist upholds:

- (1) Values that help us to see the vision God has for society and
- (2) The virtues that those who lead would aspire to.

Why? Because life is precious. And not just "life", but the lives of every age; the lives of individuals and specific societies; "these lives"...you and me and those with whom we share *this space* and *time*. These lives...are precious.

Did you catch the values and virtues the psalmist named?

- Love of justice (v. 1)
- Righteousness (v. 1)
- Right judgements and fair treatment, especially of those who are often taken advantage of or neglected by the rich and powerful. (v. 2)
- Generative of life, like the refreshing showers

of spring (v. 6)

→ Abundance and prosperity (v. 7)

That's just in four verses!

The psalmist picks up on timeless principles of godliness reflected in reverence for life. In other words, "These lives are precious."

SERMON THOUGHTS

- But if that's to be something other than a tagline in a pretty little song, we need to find ways to embody that principle in our own lives. Maybe that way, those for whom godly values and virtues are foreign will find a way to embrace them.
- Our congregation, our "Village of Faith", was just represented in the Bahamas by a multi-generational group from our Church who did just that: Embodied the principle, "These lives are precious".

And I've invited them to share of their experiences nearly 2,000 miles away while you and I were enjoying various holiday gatherings and dodging raindrops and snowflakes here at home.

BAHAMAS MISSION SHARING

- Video presentation from the trip
- Jessica, Donna, et al.

CONCLUSION / TRANSITION TO COMMUNION