

“The Brood Abides”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

May 2, 2021 – Fifth Sunday of Easter

1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

Consider the source. This is a phrase often used to encourage someone to think critically about what they hear or see, not necessarily to believe or act upon everything that one sees or hears, but only that which comes from trustworthy or authoritative people or institutions. For there are lots of loud, noisy sources of information, blasting and blaring their messages at us constantly, and all claiming to convey truth. But no matter the amplitude of the message, and regardless of how good or true something may look or sound, it may have a rotten source and should not be trusted.

A few years ago, a series of advertisements ran on television that featured Pete Coors, then one of the owners of the Coors Brewing Company. The ads showed Pete standing by a bubbling, crystal clear mountain stream, “somewhere near Golden, Colorado,” talking about the purity of the water in the beverages they produce at their largest brewery in the world. The implication of the tranquil scene is that Coors is made with perfectly clean Colorado mountain stream water. Actually, it is not, which is a very good thing. What they do use is perfectly clear water from a series of springs located directly under the brewery. They certainly do not use any water from Clear Creek, the stream that flows alongside the brewery in Golden, and is one of the crystal clear, cascading stars of the company’s ads, as many parts of Clear Creek are, unfortunately, toxic due to 150 years of mining activity that has contaminated it along with many other streams throughout Colorado. And while there have been many expensive efforts in recent years to clean up the sources of the pollutants, there are still great

problems in Colorado and throughout the Mountain West with toxins finding their way into the streams below old mines and other industrial sites (a familiar story to us here in old New England). So while many of the mountain streams may look idyllic, and may help sell beer, the water from them should not be consumed in any form without special treatment.

Likewise, there are many streams of information that cascade into our lives and flow through our world that look refreshingly clean and clear, but many of these, in spite of how they appear, are actually polluted at the source, dangerously toxic, and should not be consumed at all.

Rivers of toxic hate and fear and streams of dangerous disinformation and lies are spewed out constantly from talking heads on some TV “news” opinion shows, politicians, preachers, and so many others, and flow all around us. When we consume these, we are gravely harmed. Friends, these nasty, impure waters have no place in our lives and we ought not consume them; rather, we are to drink freely the pure waters of love, which casts out fear and gives life.

In our first reading from 1 John, we are offered one of the best and simplest pieces of theology ever written: God is love! The message in today’s gospel reading from John is that we are connected to God, who is love, as we are branches of the Vine, who is Christ. The good word for us today is that we have a pure source of life through God’s love which is all around us and within us. God is our source: We are the children of God, one family, and as God is love, the brood abides in God’s love. Praise God from whom all blessings flow! How can we not respond to God’s gift of love by loving one another? How can we not proclaim to the world this great message of good news?

And so in our word and in our work, we live out the gospel by demonstrating our life-giving love for one another. We love as the pure

source of our life loves, with *agapē* love, meaning we are actively concerned for the best interest of others, including the unlovely and unlovable, regardless of any loss or gain we might experience. And we freely give this love to one another and the world because it is so freely given to us by God.

Whenever we gather at this table to remember the last supper that Jesus shared with his disciples, we call it communion, for through this sacrament in which we celebrate that God's love and life came to us in Christ, we find communion with God and one another. Today, as we symbolically partake together of God's perfect gift of love that graciously flows freely to all of us, let us be more perfectly in communion with one another in love. And when we go from this place today, having been nourished and sustained by God's grace, may God's love and life flow through us, like a mighty river, and flood the world with God's blessing. Amen.