

Living Attunement

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11

Psalm 32

How many of you have ever taken a couple's dance class? There was a time when dance was a normal part of the social experience, but we've largely moved away from that. Participating in choreographed dance is work because it is an art as well as a skill. Having one's body moved by music is different than learning to dance with a partner. Partnership on the dance floor requires attunement. It involves watching your partner's eyes to feel their body's rhythm and then mirroring their movements. When learning, most people want to look down to avoid stepping on their partner's feet, but the movement of dance originates from the body's center and looking down throws the balance off and breaks the connection. It's awkward to learn. It's hard enough to manage one's own timing, but navigating between the push and pull with another person is difficult to master.

Dance is all about attunement. Attunement is being in harmony, alignment, or "in-tune" with another person. Among other things, it requires the cultivation of awareness because it's largely non-verbal. Learning to navigate the complexities of life is a bit like dancing in partnership with God.

We were made to be in relationship with God and other people. We were created to watch and move in relation to the natural world and to others. We were designed for attunement. When we read about God's intent for humans in Genesis, our translation of the Hebrew makes it easy to miss what's genuinely being communicated. But two words at the beginning of today's passage carry powerful implications. Our translation says Adam was put in the garden to "till" and "keep" it. Those words do not mean what we think they mean. The word "till" literally means "to worship by serving". The word "till" is the SAME

word used nearly 50 times by God to Moses when instructing the Israelites where and how to serve GOD after their escape from Egypt. And “till” is paired with the word “keep”. The word keep literally means “to conform one’s actions to”. The word “keep” is the SAME word used by GOD over 200 times when instructing the people to keep The Law. It is through our attunement to the natural world, which includes people and animals, that we know and worship God. In other words, God’s original purpose for humanity was for us to be attuned to the garden and then serve it’s needs so that that **it** could flourish and we could enjoy its bounty. Humanity’s first vocation was dancing within the garden

This religious language in Eden portrays a type of temple with Adam as the priest. God created humans to be attuned, collaborate with, serve, and be filled within the garden. The partnership of humans together with the garden was meant to create flourishing for the garden and the humans. – People were created for stewardship, not extraction, a mutual relationship where the closeness of Adam’s attunement to the natural world flowed out into abundance, where he took from and gave back as a couple dancing in fluid motion. And in his proto-priestly role, Adam was meant to be a bridge between Heaven and Earth, blessing and serving the garden and thereby also ministering to others.

The design was broken when Adam failed to serve the garden. He chose to exploit the creation to serve his own desire. Rather than participating with it, in mutual communion, he sought autonomy over it. He took from it, for his own gain, forsaking his attunement with the garden, and consequently, with God. His relationship with his own identity, with his partner, with the garden, and with God was broken the moment his desire turned him inward and away from the attunement outward that he was designed for. Later, the story tells us this event damaged Adam’s vocational identity. Outside The Garden the earth would reject attunement with humans. The Garden was the original way through which humans would experience God’s blessing, and now the earth would be a source of sweat and pain. Humanity would continue to be a bridge between Heaven and Earth, but attunement with both God and the natural world would become much more elusive.

In his epistle to the Romans, Paul defines sin with the word “hamartia”, meaning estrangement from God. We were meant to be attuned to the natural world, in perfect step, fully aware of God’s movements through creation, fully trusting ourselves to be led, fully serving and fully being served. Even after sin, God remains near to us. But our turning away from God keeps us from being able to do or receive what we were made for. Today’s Psalm illustrates the pain we feel to have God so close to us when we have turned away. The nearness that is meant to be our greatest good, becomes like a hand heavily pressed upon us when our relationship is broken. When we hide, like Adam in the garden, like the Psalmist who refused to acknowledge his sin, we conceal our own selves from God’s mercy. Then, when we turn back, reclaiming our communion with the God whose love never fails, that same hand becomes our sanctuary and hiding place. Our honesty with God, our vulnerable humility, grants us a way back into attunement and all the blessing that goes with it.

We live in a world where everything is clamoring for our attunement, trying to break our connection with God. Jesus knew what that was like. The story of his temptation in the wilderness mirrors the story of Adam in The Garden. Satan tried to get Jesus to take his eyes off God, to turn inward, away from attunement with the creator. - Promoting selfishness, self-advancement, and questioning God’s character are the same tricks the enemy used in both stories. Unlike Adam, Jesus’ attunement with God never wavered so the temptations never overpowered him. Through Jesus, we learn that keeping our eyes locked on God, staying in step with our dance partner, is THE way we avoid falling for the enemy’s lies.

Paul speaks of this lock-step attunement to God with an interesting phrase. He says that those who live this way, those who accept the free grace of Jesus to step into this dance, “exercise dominion in life”. He teaches that the consequences of Adam’s rejection of attunement with God brought death. That death now rules the created world. Adam turned his eyes from God, trusting the enemy’s lies, and exploiting that which he was

created to serve. Now, humanity lives under the heavy dominion of death. We all feel it, and it governs us, lying to us, keeping us turned inward, heavy, and afraid. But through Jesus, we are freed from that oppression, liberated to reclaim our vocational identity. We now “exercise dominion in life”. We do not reign over anyone; we reign with Christ. This is not subjugating power, but freedom from the dominion of death, freedom from the enemy’s lies that keep us from our true identity and purpose, freedom to live. We are no longer dictated to by fear and death. We now participate in life! And according to Paul, our reclamation of our vocational identity allows us to participate fully in the life Christ offers to “all”.

We no longer live in The Garden. Perfect attunement has been broken. What was designed to happen naturally now requires sweaty effort. None of us escape the toil of labor in this life. But, because of Jesus’ sacrifice, we now have the freedom to allow our work to be empowered by the reign of God. When we reclaim our vocation, seeking attunement with God to serve the created world, we act as a bridge between heaven and earth, sharing and propagating life where once there was only death.

Attunement in a world outside The Garden is not easy. This world is ruled by thorns, sweat, dust, and death and it will be until Jesus returns. All that discomfort makes us desperate for relief. This world offers endless distractions that numb the pain. Attunement requires us to cultivate our attention, noticing things we’d otherwise overlook, choosing presence when numbing and distraction offer instant relief. Dancing with God is exhilarating, but it takes time and effort to develop the attunement necessary to enjoy it. Learning involves watching our feet, losing our balance, stepping on toes, and bonking our heads. But once we learn to keep our eyes locked with God’s, to allow ourselves to be moved by God’s movements, we experience what it means to reign in life and see that reflected in the lives of those around us when our labors bridge Heaven and Earth.

May we be a people marked by our attunement with God, rejecting distraction, and purposing through our gaze and our work to be a bridge for the whole created world between heaven and earth.