



First United Church of Oak Park **Deep Within**

Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 1:26-28; Matthew 2:1-12

The Rev. John Edgerton

December 24, 2021 (Christmas Eve)

The past two years have taught me a great deal. About myself, about the world, about sourdough, about online yoga, about what it's like to eat the same thing for breakfast for months, about how to be on a Zoom call while my daughter is screaming at me in the same room, about what makes for mental health, about just how long a person will wait before they admit they are not okay. The past two years have taught me a great deal, mostly about what matters and what—in the end—does not. And more than anything, what I've learned that matters is togetherness.

I've learned just how much it matters. Togetherness, a close sense of connection with others, it is like a vital nutrient which cannot be gone without, not forever. This need for togetherness is deep and primordial, rooted in our very nature, in our bodies, in our minds, in our spirits. This is something I knew before, of course. It is why an infant instinctively calms when their parent holds them—breath and heartbeat falling into rhythm with the one who holds them. It is why people cluster as close as possible around a campfire. It is why at every dinner party invariably the kitchen is packed despite having no seating, all while a perfectly good living room and its many couches stand empty.

This need for togetherness is deep and primordial, rooted in our very nature, in our bodies, in our minds, in our spirits. Where does it come from? As a Christian, I know where it comes from. It comes from God. Our deep and primordial need to be together: this comes from God's own nature, God's great need for togetherness. Humanity's need for togetherness is a

reflection of God's nature. And I mean reflection in an optical sense. Just as the cool and beautiful light of the moon is a reflection of the glorious blazing sun, so too is the loveliness of our desire to be with one another a reflection of God's glorious blazing love for us, God's inextinguishable desire to be with us.

This is what we see revealed in the doctrine of the Trinity, that God's essential nature is a relationship among three persons that is a fuller unity than the merely solitary.

God's need for togetherness is revealed in the stories of Christmas. We see God move heaven and earth in order to be with humanity. God, who could do anything She chose, placed togetherness at the very heart of the story of salvation. God, who could BE anything She chose, became an infant—helpless, vulnerable, crying out to be held close so that the breath and heartbeat of God might fall in rhythm with Mary's.

Emmanuel: God With Us.

This need for togetherness is deep and primordial, rooted in our very nature, in our bodies, in our minds, in our spirits. Where does it come from? As a Christian, I know where it comes from. It comes from God. These well-loved passages that we will hear again, I hope you will listen to them as if for the first time. These beloved carols, I hope you will listen to them as if for the first time. And when we sing together again, for some among us, this will be the first time singing together in two years. When we sing Silent Night and Joy to the World outside, ringed around our labyrinth and looking our neighbor in the eye, I hope you will sing them as if for the first time, letting the wonder of it all sweep you up into celebration. For you, for all of you, the story of Christmas

That is the story we tell at Christmas, again and again, year after year. Not because we have forgotten, but because of our need to hear of God's headlong love for us, there is no end. Let us begin.