

UU Sermon, Think Like A Bee  
July 2016

- Create a buzz
- Sip life's sweet moments
- Mind your own beeswax
- Work together
- Always find your way home
- Stick close to your honey
- Bee yourself!

Big Thanks to Doug Cowan and your worship team for the invitation to speak and the spirit of Love and compassion for the Natural World which I know lives in the DNA of this congregation. I am grateful. Thank you also to my Celtic Coyote conspirators for the music that celebrates holy creation AND to Pastors Christine and Angela, my colleagues for years when I was a Mennonite Minister. It was always great to know you were here doing the good work as kindred spirits. And to you all, who have come today and opened your hearts to hopefully a good word.

Bees making golden honey out of all my old mistakes. And I've made some doozies in my life. I love that idea of the bad choices and ways I've aggrieved others and myself as being redeemed by the bees. And not just a metaphor, but in reality, everything from the hive is a gift of medicine. Something nutritious and life sustaining that the bees gift us freely. Raw Honey being an anti-microbial, anti-fungal, anti-bacterial superfood. And it's also now being used in treating open wounds because of these very properties.

So it is an apt image. The golden honey, overflowing the perimeter of our hearts, dripping that elixir of life, nectar of the golden sun, down, down, down into the dark recesses, the closets of my life that I don't want to open lest a skeleton falls out or bee seen by others. The warm fragrant flowery syrup beginning to thaw even the most corrupted and wounded places within yourself.

Bees, as all creatures on this planet, have the most amazing ability to adapt to what life hands them. We can learn from them just on this account. They are resilient beyond belief. As a beekeeper, for almost 6 years now, I have visited some terrible things on my bees, out of ignorance and fear. A bee friend says we don't keep bees, so much as they keep us! Fortunately, a single bee will only live about 30-40 days max, so the possibility of holding a grudge against me is brief. But the hive mind is something to be reckoned with. It's not just one bee but the whole hive that carries the information, the consciousness, the wisdom to act and work in the world.

I have a beehive this summer that is "hot". That means that when I go to open them up, there is always some drama going on. A queen being replaced. Drones being kicked out. Overpopulation. Wall to wall honey reserves and no place left to store it, so they start cross combing. Ask Christine what a mess that is. My opening the hive only adds to the complication, since I am viewed as a predator, much as a bear, and they have taken out after me forcing my hand to retreat inside to nurse my stings as

the bees found my vulnerable spot—a bee bonnet/veil that was not securely fastened, hastily thrown on sandals with exposed feet, pantlegs that aren't tied off, hands without gloves. They merrily swarm inside to teach me a lesson in humility. And hive mind doesn't forgive and forget quickly. After showering and changing clothes, I sat down to tea on my back porch. The hive mind continued to send guard bees after me to drive me inside, far far away from them. It was only after I realized that I was wearing brown and black, the same color as most animal predators, that I had to laugh. The hive mind is smart.

This beehive has also been the proverbial “busy bee” hive, putting away more honey than I ever dreamt was possible in one season. Raising more bees than I could keep up with as I split them in half more than once to keep them from swarming away for lack of room---A whirlwind of biblical proportion in the sky, which is not a good sign for my good neighborly intentions.

The name for my organization, **Think Like A Bee**, came to me years before I left my ministry post last summer, (AMC) almost a year ago now. It came about as I observed my girls, as I affectionately call them. *(yes, all the workers and queen are females. The drones/males are called up for mating and passing on the genetic code once a year).*

This title for my non-profit yet to be, came to me because as I became a student of honeybees. I realized that in order to become a decent beekeeper, I would need to learn to “**Think Like A Bee**”. But it also wasn't lost on me, that bees reveal many lessons for us as humans to learn if we can only get inside the hive mind. Actually, the lessons are more about re-learning, since colonies are not so different from us as humans, which is probably why we are so fascinated by them. Like us, they are social beings. Like us, they have a division of labor and a language, a way of communicating with one another that is highly evolved---from the waggle dance as a gesture of communication to nonverbal cues that involve all the senses. And sadly, like us, they can exercise violence upon members of the community as a form of social control, dominance or to survive at the expense of others at times.

But one of the biggest lessons for me has been their resilience and cheerful community spirit for the commonwealth of all as they build their home and sustain it together. No “me firsts” or “it's all about me prima donas” in the colony. Even the queen, contrary to popular opinion, has a drudgery of a life. She is led about and fed by her sister “assistant bees”, living her whole life in the colony laying eggs, dying in the darkness, emptied out of her life force. It will be the workers who make big decisions, like finding a new zipcode to live, not her, though the colony will take cues from her pheromones as to their mood. If the Queen is well, the colony is in a good mood.. I'm not advocating that we live lives of drudgery, but the bees hallmark service for the commongood is truly remarkable. Something our culture needs to deepen into now.

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Over all, you might say the hive is Like a utopia where, though there is a division of labor, all benefit from equal access to resources and a chance to fulfill their fullest ***insect potential***(as fully as one can in the creaturely world determined by instinct and a reptilian brain) —moving through each role in succession from nurse bee to janitor, mortician, architect comb builder, honey storer, guard bee and finally, the pinnacle, a field bee, dancing among the flowers gathering pollen and nectar in the warm sunshine—the last role before the bee dies. This most important role is about feeding the colony. Believe me, even that role isn't all it's cracked up to be. Bees wings will be ragged by the end of their service and I will often see them crawling on the ground, exhausted. This role has the most risk of being drowned in the rain, eaten by a bird, sprayed by a backyard gardener, dying a few feet from the hive, one's life energy spent in the ***final hallowed glories of gathering nectar for honey*** Still, imagine the beehive is a microcosm of the whole world, where everyone has a part to play in a well orchestrated drama of life and death. There are no homeless bees, unless of course we as humans evict them from their house or shoo them out of their carefully chosen dwelling in our attic rafters.

There is no unemployed bee. All have jobs, even the most menial are absolutely of worth and necessary in the hive. Every bee gets the chance to move up in life and experience the sweetness of nectar gathering—in all it's hardness and poetic beauty.

There are no bee civil wars unless you count the virgin queens grappling for dominance and the throne. But there will be no mass torture or killings of one's own kind. It would be a suicidal act and mean death for the whole colony.

There is only straight forward honest hard day's labor on behalf of the whole. As a Christian minister, I see this is the Gospel in action. It is putting walking shoes on what it means to love one another, love one's enemies and be compassionate. I don't think anyone would ever accuse a buzzy invertebrate bee of being compassionate, but it sure looks and smells like compassion.

They even allow us as humans who have colonized and domesticated them over centuries to take their honey and pollen and other gifts of the hive such as royal jelly pollen, propolis for medicine. Not that they are warm hearted creatures, willing to share, no. ...I see it as an economy of grace which our whole Mother earth gives us. A reciprocity of generous gifts, and our gift back in the circle dance of life, is to offer them the gift of taking care of Mother Earth well.

As I have left the ministry for a time, the bees have continued to be spiritual teachers for me. You can read the sometimes joyous, sometimes horrendous, never a dull moment journey on my blog ([www.thinklikeabee.org](http://www.thinklikeabee.org)). As I have left ministry for a time, I have had many new thoughts, and some old and reoccurring ones about organized religion. I fear that many religions have become a smokescreen for their particular brand of "tribalism", using their god names to justify dominance and superiority. Judgement can be particularly omnipresent and oppressive in any

brand of religion, whether about the person next to us in the pew or that congregation down the street, or that Muslim person in my workplace.

The thing I've appreciated about the hive mind, the whole colony of bees is that they cover over a multitude of sins by working together in the trenches side by side, day after exhausting day, month after month, season after season.

I've come to think that what organized religion at it's best could be alongside our beautiful rituals and nourishing worship—regularly acting in the trenches with people who are not like us at all. Sarah Miles, a self avowed atheist, lesbian, former sous chef, war zone journalist and mom\_who wrote, **“Take this Bread”**, talks about her journey to become an Episcopalian. It was at the communion table where she heard the words of belonging, that everyone was welcome. From that she began a remarkable journey of starting a low income food pantry at her church, which happened weekly around the very same Eucharistic Table she had been welcomed. She loved food, people and believed in justice, never imagining what this combination of combining nice church people with “those people” would unleash in her and her community.

Since I have left ministry, I have landed in the world outside Mother Church, sometimes not so gracefully, sometimes on my backend, rather than my feet, as I have been working on projects to make ABQ a Pollinator Friendly City called **Bee City USA** (we will bring a resolution to the Council Aug. 15) and in the South Valley with Cornelio Candelaria Organic Farm that is a force for good, healthy food and lifestyle in the 'hood, giving fresh vegetables to families, offering nutrition courses at the local community center, keeping youth off the streets by sinking their hands in the good earth to learning the skills of farming and beekeeping. It has been extremely uncomfortable and frustrating at times, and deeply delightful and fulfilling at others.

Years, I read the autobiography of Albert Schweitzer, highly accomplished German organist and Theologian who left it all behind at the turn of the last century to become a trained doctor in Africa. His reasoning for leaving the safe and comfortable well heeled world of polite European society was that the ivory towers of theology and religion were, well, exquisitely “precious” up there in the rarified air of religious thinking and doctrine. (my words). He wanted to do something that would alleviate the suffering of the world. And he did. Living through the horrors of WWI and WWII which he was tormented by, he perfected his final opus, a manifesto named **“Reverence for life”**

It was a call for respect, dignity and compassion for all living beings---human and nonhuman alike. I have continued to return to this— so profound was it for me.

Today our pollinators are in trouble. Native bees and Honeybees in particular, which are highly stressed and dying from diseases and mites at an unprecedented rate. Last year saw 44% losses in the commercial honeybee industry. Why? The perfect storm —from the ways we keep them—hauling them around the country for pollination, insulting them by dumping chemicals on them and the very habitat they

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pollinate, to the larger issues of climate change, monocropping in Big Ag sector and loss of habitat due to human development.

Perhaps it is time for the tables to be reversed as we seek to turn around our own mistakes where bees and the whole of Creation are concerned. Perhaps it is time to offer them honey and welcome them to the table, these non human friends, for healing and wholeness.

Thank you Doug and Steve for the bee song you wrote on behalf of bees... a call to action.