

I read an interesting article in The Atlantic recently about how we all construct the narratives of our lives.

We create a story arc for our life and it's what helps to shape our personality.

It's not as cut and dry as finding the most pivotal moments of your life and just drawing a line between them.

Your story arc is the way you pick out those seminal events in your life, and then weave them back together to make meaning.

Your story might be based upon your career or romance or faith or your values or the struggles that you've survived.

The ways we construct the stories of our lives determine what we think are the most important aspects of our identity.

And when we meet someone, we immediately start comparing our story to theirs.

What do I have in common with this person?

What lived experiences do I share with them?

Are they from the same place that I am from?

Do they have the same hobbies?

Have they overcome the same illness or addiction?

Do we share the same religion?

Do we have the same alma mater?

There are a million and one things that we can value, that we then seek out in other people.

The less that we think we have in common with someone, the more we 'other' them, the less relatable they are.

While we are busy doing these mental scavenger hunts, the truth is that we don't have to look that hard, we have a lot more in common than we think.

We don't have to go digging for that one obscure thing that we have in common with the other person, in fact, here are a few things that I think most humans have in common:

love of and devotion to our families (even if they are dysfunctional, even if they are really frustrating, we generally love the people whom we call family).

Also, the desire to be healthy and pain-free, this is pretty biological.

Nobody wants to live with chronic pain, and when you have an illness or injury, it usually shoots to the top of the priority list.

Protection of children.

I'd say that most of us believe in the safety and protection of the children in our communities, our country and around the world. Another thing I think we have in common, and I hope I am not projecting: desire for happiness for others.

I would think that most of us wish for happiness for other people, in other words, we don't wish suffering upon them.

Another thing I imagine most of us have in common is the desire for peace, peace within our towns, peace within our country and peace around the world.

Some people might enjoy war and fighting, but my guess is that they are the minority.

We want to live happily, in peace, with our friends and families, I imagine most other folks around the world do too.

And, if the person you're talking to is a Christian, as if all those other things aren't enough, then you have even more in common.

There are over 2 billion, with a b, billion Christians in the world.

I think that each and every one of those folks claims to follow Jesus, and believes in his life's story, which was birth, life, death, and resurrection, life again.

I imagine that all 2 billion of us try to follow his teachings and treat others the way he taught us to.

Some of us are probably better at it than others.

Today is World Communion Sunday, and that's exactly what we are celebrating today.

Each year we set aside this day to recognize all that we have in common with the other Christians around the world.

We can easily get siloed.

Whether we divide ourselves up according to the country or region we're from, or what kind of Christian we are, you know, Protestant, Catholic, non-denominational, conservative, progressive, evangelical,

we use so many words to identify ourselves that it can quickly feel like we have precious little in common with other Christians.

But that's not true, we just tend to focus on our differences.

Well today we're invited focus on our commonalities which are much larger than the differences that we have.

We're gathered to celebrate and lift up all that we share with our Christian siblings around the world.

I like to think of us as one big, complicated family, who should be there for each other in times of joy and sorrow.

Now, if that sounds like a tall order, or an unrealistic, utopian portrayal of Christians around the world, let's talk for a minute about the scripture we heard this morning.

The passage is from the book of Ephesians, which means that it is attributed to the Apostle Paul, and it's a letter written to the people in the city of Ephesus.

His audience is the former Jews and Gentiles who are now Christians.

In the passage just before this, that we didn't read, Paul writes that, *"[Jesus] has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross..."* (Ephesians 2: 16-17)

It's hard for us, thousands of years later, to comprehend just how deep the divide was between Jews and Gentiles, although the fact that Jewish men literally had surgery to differentiate themselves from Gentiles, should give us some hint as to how disparate these groups were.

That wall of separation was insurmountable.

Imagine for a minute, the idea of members of the Ku Klux Klan befriending and sitting down to dinner with African Americans.

Imagine Skinheads or Neo-Nazis breaking bread with Orthodox Jews.

Imagine the proponents of zero-tolerance immigration coming to understand the undocumented folks who cross our border as their brothers and sisters.

If we can imagine the radical nature of any of these scenarios, then we might start to get a glimmer of understanding of what it was like for Jews and Gentiles to worship together.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians was nothing short of revolutionary.

He was truly trying to bring unity and reconciliation to these groups that saw themselves as radically different, as having virtually *nothing* in common.

Bringing these groups together was the nearly impossible task that Jesus was trying to accomplish through this difficult ministry, which is why I think it took the supreme tragedy, grief and horror of his crucifixion to finally bring these groups together.

Maybe that's what they needed to understand how much Jesus loved them, how much God loved them, and how much they needed to love each other.

Jesus loved both of these groups of people so much that he was willing to give his life for them, the least they could do was try to extend that same love to one another.

If Jesus, and then Paul, were able to bring these disparate groups together, then surely we can come together with our Christian family around the world, we can overcome the barriers and the differences that we see.

We can come to understand that we have so much more in common than we do difference.

Paul reminds us that Christ is the cornerstone, the foundation upon which this whole reconciling religious experiment is built.

Imagine if we were able to show the world what it looks like when a group of religious adherents all get along, and I mean really get along.

Imagine if we could demonstrate what it looks like to respect each other, to live out our shared values, to put unity above all else.

And I don't want to confuse getting along with sameness.

I am not trying to imply that all Christians are the same, hardly.

I am simply saying that our differences, cultural, linguistic, political, or otherwise, no longer present a division or obstacle to deep and abiding peace.



The grace of Christ's gospel message is able to traverse all the barriers that we put up which allow us to differentiate ourselves from others.

And let us not forget that we celebrate our union with our Christian partners on Communion Sunday, and that's no coincidence.

It's because food brings us together.

We gather over meals, and we generally don't eat with our enemies.

Let us have a worldwide feast where we don't sit at one end only with our friends and the people who look and think like us, the people whose lifelong story arc somehow intersects our own.

This is a feast in which we're at a huge table and we're all mixed up and we're getting along,

and the food is abundant, and the music is playing,

and the children are running around, and the dogs are under the table eating our scraps or the vegetables that the kids feed them.

Let's make this a joyous, sacred meal through which we show the world that they can be part of it too, just pull up more chairs, we always have more room.

I think that's what the realm of God looks like on earth, let us make it so.

Amen.

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