The Serviceberry: Life Code

Week Four: Nothing Flourishes Alone

Reading: *The Serviceberry* by Robin Wall Kimmerer

We say we are *connected* to nature, to one another, and to God. But "connection" can imply that separate things have been joined. What if we were never separate to begin with?
We are not separate beings who occasionally enter into relationships. We are expressions of Life that come into being through relationship.
This week we ask: Who am I, really, if I have never existed apart from the Whole?

1. WHO DO I THINK I AM?

From the time we are very young, we begin developing a sense of who we are. We are given names, raised within families and cultures, and shaped by experiences, relationships, beliefs, and expectations. Over time, we construct an identity… an understanding about ourselves that helps us make sense of who we are and where we fit in the world.

But how much of that identity reflects who we truly are, and how much has been shaped by what we've experienced, what others have told us, and what we've come to believe about ourselves?

Our personalities, stories, and conditioned identities are not unimportant nor irrelevant. But… they are not the whole truth of our being. Our live experience shapes us, but it does not define us.

Discuss

- What has most influenced your sense of who you are? (Consider your family, upbringing, culture, relationships, accomplishments, challenges, and the expectations of others.)

- How has your understanding of who you are changed throughout your life? What, if anything, has remained constant?

2. BELONGING - THE COURAGE TO BE WHO WE ARE

Almost everyone knows the longing to belong: to be known, welcomed, valued, and accepted. Yet in trying to belong, we sometimes forsake our own self.

Researcher Brené Brown distinguishes *fitting in* from *true belonging*. Fitting in asks us to adapt to other people's expectations in exchange for their acceptance. True belonging calls for courage, vulnerability, and authenticity… even when being ourselves means standing alone.

Human communities can accept or reject us; relationships can change or end. That pain is real, and spirituality should never be used to dismiss it. Yet might we also belong to Life in a way no person can grant or take away?

From a New Thought perspective, we do not *become* expressions of Divine Life. We already are expressions of Divine Life. We do not have to earn our place in Life. Our existence establishes our belonging.

DISCUSS

- Have you ever concealed or changed part of yourself to fit in? How did that impact you?
- What beliefs, fears, or old stories might keep you from experiencing the belonging that is already yours?

3. WHEN THE BOUNDARIES GROW THIN - GLIMPSES OF ONENESS

Usually, we experience ourselves as distinct individuals moving through a world outside of us. Yet many people recall moments when that familiar sense of separation becomes less pronounced.

Perhaps you have stood beneath a night sky and felt part of something immense; become absorbed in music until the distinction between listening and experiencing seemed to disappear; or known a moment of profound stillness in prayer, meditation, love, or nature.

Mystical traditions explore such experiences, in which the usual division between an individual and a greater reality seems to fall away. We need not manufacture these moments or assume everyone experiences them alike. Their significance is that they invite us to reconsider what we have taken for granted about the self. Perhaps they offer glimpses of a reality that is present even when our ordinary awareness cannot perceive it.

DISCUSS

- Have you experienced a moment when the boundary of your individual self softened or disappeared (perhaps in nature, prayer, love, or wonder)? How did this impact you?

4. THE INDIVIDUAL SELF AND WHAT WE CALL GOD - MUTUAL BELONGING

Religious and spiritual traditions understand God in different ways - as a distant Sky Being, a loving Presence, and/or the Ground of All Being and true essence of all existence. How we understand God shapes how we understand ourselves and our relationship to Life.

In New Thought we often say, *God is within me.* But this can still reduce God or insolate It to an unknown place within us. Consider this: *Divine Life is our very nature… the One Source and ground of our existence, expressing through our potential and unique individuality***.**

We are not claiming to be all that God is. Yet the Life through which we exist is inseparable from its Source.

This is the mystery of *Mutual Belonging*. We belong to the Whole, and the Whole finds expression *in* and *through* and *as* us. Our individuality is real, but our deepest identity reaches beyond the personality, roles, and experiences through which we have learned to define ourselves.

From this understanding, spiritual awakening is not about finding our way to God, but recognizing the Divine Life that has always been the very ground and potential of our being.

DISCUSS

- How has your understanding of God shaped the way you understand yourself and your place in Life?

- What is the difference between believing that God is somewhere within you and recognizing Divine Life as your very nature?

- What happens to your understanding of worth, purpose, and potential when you consider that your life is an inseparable expression of the Divine?

CLOSING EXPERIENCE

Ask one person to read this slowly.

Become still. Close your eyes. Notice your breath. Life is already moving through you. Breathe.

For a moment, release your name, roles, accomplishments, responsibilities, and your story of who you must become. Simply notice the experience of being alive.

You are an individual, but you are not an isolated existence. You do not have to find your way to God… you are already within it.

Now open your eyes- and AROUND THE CIRCLE – complete the following statement:

- **Something I am beginning to understand differently about myself is…**

PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK - FROM SEPARATENESS TO PRESENCE

Each day, choose a few moments to move beyond thinking *about* Oneness and become quietly attentive to the Life you are experiencing - in nature, music, prayer, meditation, or a simple breath.

NOTICE: What happens when I loosen my attachment to the roles and stories through which I define myself?

RECOGNIZE: Can I recognize that this moment, and my experience of it, is part of a greater Life (Greater Reality)?

REMEMBER: What might change if I lived not as someone trying to find God, but as an expression of Divine potential and Divine Life?