Perfect Harmony

Colossians 3:12-17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved,
clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility,
meekness, and patience.

Bear with one another
and, if anyone has a complaint against another,
forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you,
so you also must forgive.

Above all, clothe yourselves with love,
which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,
to which indeed you were called in the one body.

And be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly;
teach and admonish one another in all wisdom;
and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms,
hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

And whatever you do, in word or deed,
do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Perfect Harmony

Colossians 3:12-17

December 26, 2021

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I.

Last week, I can't remember which night, as we were going to bed, I suddenly burst out singing a tune that bubbled up from my brain, which is something I do for Linda from time to time.

I'd Like To Teach The World To Sing

I'd like to build the world a home
And furnish it with love
Grow apple trees and honey bees
And snow white turtle doves

I'd like to see the world for once
All standing hand in hand
And hear them echo through the hills
For peace throughout the land

I'd like to teach the world to sing
In perfect harmony
I'd like to hold it in my arms
And keep it company

II.

Turns out that this was a wee bit of the Woo Woo and The Weird, and I didn't even know it until just the other day when I read the lectionary reading for this Sunday. Here, in his letter to the Colossians, the Apostle Paul presents the positive dimensions of life in Christ not as intentions or attributes but, rather, as *actions*. Believers in Christ are to "put on" certain characteristics such that we actually *live* these qualities; we do not just merely *have* them. More than just traits or attributes, these actions articulated by Paul define what it means to live out the life of faith. The Christian virtues of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, describe the character of active, faith-filled living. As God's chosen people, we are called out of the ordinary realm of human existence to be especially dedicated to God through the love with which God first loved us.

III.

With a subtle nuance, Paul continues in the passage to say it isn't just *what* we do (though that is certainly important), it is also *how* we do what we do (the posture or attitude with which we enact these virtues). That is, with a spirit of forgiveness, with a peace that rules the heart, with thankfulness for, and with, all things, allowing the Word of God to dwell richly within us, and, from a perspective of thanksgiving, to celebrate with a myriad of joyful expressions; psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (which was what last Sunday's Service of Lessons and Carols was all about).

However, all of these things, both the "what" and the "how" of Christian virtue, spring forth *from* love and are held together *in* love. Paul says: "Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

IV.

Certainly today, on the first Sunday after Christmas (or Christmastide) we have ample cause to speak about love. The love of parents to seek the best for their child and children. The love of God to gift the world with the King of King who salvation brings. The love of adoration which prompted angels to sing, shepherds to seek, and Magi to follow. And the love born of the magic, mystery and meaning of Christmas morning.

In reading this passage, however, what really caught my attention, foretold by last week's impromptu song, was the power of such a love to bind all things together in *perfect* harmony. Now *that* is a depth worth plumbing on such a day as this. To do so, the tool I would invite us to use is the Fibonacci Sequence in which each number is the sum of the two preceding ones. So 0+1=1; 1+1=2; 1+2=3; 2+3=5 and so on; which results in the number series 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, …

V.

The Fibonacci Sequence is something we all know and will recognize; though we may not *know* we know. However, we surely know it when we *see* it, as I'm sure each of you will recognize the shape found in each of the illustrations on the cover of today's bulletin, which is the geometric representation of the Fibonacci Sequence.

This shape, the Fibonacci Spiral, appears throughout the natural world in the branching in trees, the arrangement of leaves on a stem, the fruit sprouts of a pineapple, the flowering of an artichoke, in the formation of the nautilus shell, in the uncurling of a fern, the population growth of a honeybee colony the arrangement of scales on a pinecone and petals on a flower and, very prominently, in the arrangement of seeds in a sunflower. The Fibonacci Sequence also can be found in the earth's atmosphere and the cosmos in the spiral shape of hurricanes and of galaxies like our own Milky Way; as well as other structures in the universe such as Andromeda Nebula.

VI.

Closer to home, the Fibonacci Sequence is evident in our own bodies, as most of our body parts follow the numbers one (nose), two (eyes), three (segments to each limb) and five (fingers on each of two hands). Shrinking ever smaller, the double helix pattern of the structure of our DNA also follows the Fibonacci Sequence.

This numerical progression we now refer to as the "Fibonacci Sequence" was first noted several hundred years before Christ by the ancient Indian poet and mathematician Pingala. He noticed a pattern of long and short syllables in the structure of even more ancient Sanskrit writings and, using a binary representation of these syllables, identified what was only later named the Fibonacci Sequence by the 19th century French mathematician, Édouard Luca, after studying the work of 12th century Italian mathematician, Leonardo Bigollo Pisano (Leonardo the Traveler From Pisa) who, some centuries later, was nick-named Fibonacci.

VII.

In his life, Fibonacci travelled around the Mediterranean coast, meeting with many merchants and learning about their systems of doing arithmetic. He soon realized the many advantages of the Hindu-Arabic system which, unlike Roman numerals, allowed easy calculation using a place-value system, and brought the Hindu-Arabic system into widespread use in Europe.

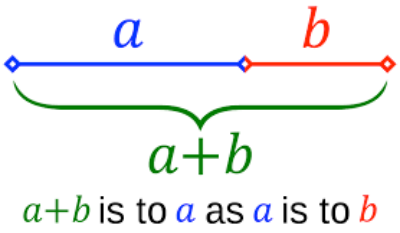
In 1202, Fibonacci published his book, *Liber Abaci* (*Book of Abacus or Calculation*) which employed a study of how rabbits were bred to discover a consist and repeatable numerical progression of breeding pairs; with this pattern of numbers later being dubbed the Fibonacci Sequence.

VIII.

Going even deeper, the basis of the Fibonacci Sequence, is what is termed the "Golden Ratio" and is often referred to as the most beautiful number in the universe; that is 1.618. Or, to express it as a ratio, 1:1.6.

To arrive at the "Golden Ratio," we take a line and divide it into two parts. If we take the longer part (which we'll call "a") and divide it by the smaller part (call it "b") such that the smaller part (b) is equal to the sum of (a) + (b) then divide by (a), these will both equal 1.618.

A visual representation is easier to grasp, so those of you listening today might want to check out the written sermon posted to the church website, and emailed out to everyone each week.



I'm also providing a link to a YouTube video that does a nice job of explaining both the Fibonacci Sequence and the Golden Ratio (about 10 minutes long).

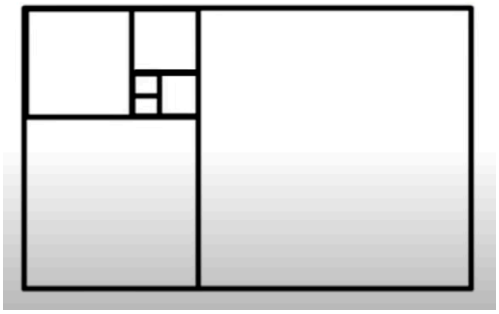
(Demonstrate Golden Ratio using my arm.)

IX.

Whether you realize it or not, the Golden ratio is found, and used just about *everywhere*; particularly in art and architecture as it pleasing to the eye; that is to say "beautiful."

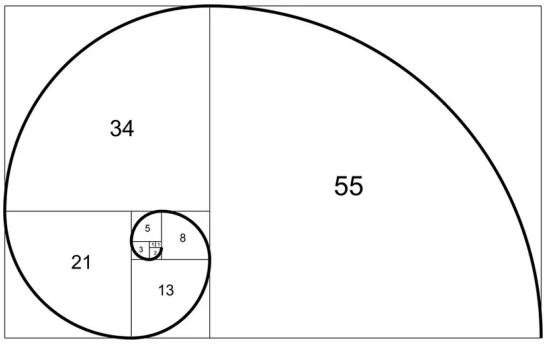
If we take a rectangle with one side measure "1" and the other side "1.6" we get a nicely proportioned box.

Then, if take this rectangle, and insert another, smaller Golden Ratio proportioned rectangle, and another, and another, we end up with what looks to be an inward spiral of rectangles.



X.

Now, we reach way back into the far reaches of our junk drawer to fine our hand-dandy French protractor, and connect to the corners of the rectangles we end up right back where we started: with the spiral based on Fibonacci Sequence.



The Fibonacci Sequence, the Golden Ratio and the resulting Fibonacci Spiral, are all examples of the Woo Woo and Weird to be found in mathematics, our natural world and the cosmos.

XI.

As reason and science took hold within the context of tightly structured religious societies, mostly Christian, discoveries such as the Fibonacci Sequence and Golden Ratio made it an easy leap to Deism: the belief in the existence of a supreme being, specifically of a creator, but one who does not necessarily intervene in the universe or human affairs. A Deist is one who likens God to a creative watchmaker who has crafted an intricate and beautiful device, wound it up and, thereafter, stepped away to allow let it run as intended with no further involvement necessary; even if it is desired, or sought, by particular parts of the watch.

Our own Reformed Theology understands such a belief as "General Revelation." That the fingerprints of God the Creator are to be found in such a perfect harmony all throughout the creation, revealing Godself to us, and causing us to believe that there is an order and cohesion to the Creation and, hence, to our own lives.

XII.

However, when the Apostle Paul speaks of perfect harmony, he is referring to what Reformed Theology terms "Special Revelation": that God has also choses to reveal Godself through miraculous means which include physical appearances of God, dreams, visions, the Woo Woo and the Weird, the work of the Holy Spirit, the written Word of God and, most importantly, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The difference between these two different types of divine disclosure, is that while Special Revelation is "saving," General Revelation is not. General Revelation can take us all the way down the field, but Special Revelation is required to cross the goal line and get into the end zone.

XIII.

Now, *here* is where things get a little tricky. While General Revelation is scientifically *provable*, Special Revelation is only *knowable*. The perfect harmony of which Paul speaks isn't just found in mathematics or the natural world, it is also discoverable in the character of an active and faith-filled existence as manifested in the virtuous actions of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; all of which are bound together in love; specifically, the love with which God so loves the world, and the love we are to have, especially, for each other and, more generally, for the entire creation.

Whereas the perfect harmony of the General Revelation of God can be found in such places as the Fibonacci Sequence and the Golden Ratio, the perfect harmony of the Special Revelation of God is to be found in a different kind of number equation, "where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matt. 18:20) and in not a Golden Ratio but, instead, in the "Golden Rule."

XIV.

If we'd like to build the world a home, we must furnish it with the perfect harmony of love. We step out of the ordinary realm of existence to allow love to bind us together, causing us to stand hand in hand, hold each other in our arms and keep company with one another. A song of the perfect harmony of love is what we have gathered here to sing, and teach the world, on this first day in Christmastide, year of our Lord MMXXI, at the First Presbyerian Church on the Park. Amen.

I'd Like To Teach The World To Sing

D
I'd like to build the world a home
E
And furnish it with love
A
Grow apple trees and honey bees
G **D**
And snow white turtle doves

D
I'd like to see the world for once
E
All standing hand in hand
A
And hear them echo through the hills
G **D**
For peace throughout the land

D
I'd like to teach the world to sing
E
In perfect harmony
A
I'd like to hold it in my arms
G **D**
And keep it company