

God So Loved the (Digital) World
“GoD and DoG” You Tube Video by Wendy Francisco
Psalm 148 and Mark 1:9-15
September 9, 2018
First United Methodist Church, Baraboo
Pastor Marianne Cotter

Today and throughout September, we are going to connect this {smart phone} with this {the Bible}. We live in a digital world. We are all spending more and more time on-line, people of faith included. People watch worship services being live streamed. People go on You Tube to watch the latest Christian music videos -- or to hear a song their choir is singing. People curious about a church check out the web site or Face Book page before ever visiting. Aimee Lutz our office manager does a terrific job of keeping our web site looking great and is part of a team of people who post things on Face Book which is wonderful.

In our culture, youth spend lots of time on smart phones. Think of the generation of high school and college age youth: iGen. These are the folks born between 1995 and 2012. These are people for whom smart phones are indispensable. One study found between 2013 and 2015 high school seniors spent six hours of leisure time with new media. This six hours is spent texting (28%), Internet (24%), TV (24%), Gaming (18%) and Video chats (5%). That's six hours in addition to any screen time they spent at school.

Adults and youth spent a lot of time on You Tube for example. There are between 141 and 144 million videos on You Tube. You can learn to cook, fix your car, do house repair, learn an embroidery stitch, learn a language... what else can you do on You Tube? You can go on You Tube and watch a 13 minute video about the symbols in our church sanctuary, created by Mike Pullen and Keri Olson. Ever since YouTube first came on the scene in 2006, short funny video clips of dogs and cats and babies have been very popular. I'm going to show you a You Tube Video this morning which I learned about from United Methodist pastor Adam Hamilton. It's become very popular with United Methodists. Before I show it I want to tell you why I'm showing it.

As United Methodists, in deciding questions about faith, the Bible is where we go first. That's our primary source of authority. The Bible is the Living Word of God. The Bible contains the gospel message – the Good news of what God is doing in Jesus Christ. The scripture reading is the most important thing that happens in worship. The Bible gives us the word for the day. Then the preacher gets up and tries to apply what the bible says to people's lives. And the people in the pew get to use your understanding of tradition, your reason and your experience to add your interpretation to mine. The hope of any preacher like me is that what I say is accurate, true to the gospel and that I connect that with what matters in people's

lives. The point of all this is not just that you know the Bible but so that your life, my life, our lives together become the gospel – become good news for others. If preachers like me did not connect in some way to digital world where so many people spend so much time the gospel would not be preached to the ends of the earth (like Jesus told us to do). If churches like ours weren't on Face Book, if we didn't have a web site that was excellent, then we are simply not connecting with a huge number of people where they live their lives today.

The You Tube Video I'm showing you today does an excellent job of interpreting the scripture. The Hebrew scripture, Psalm 148, celebrates that animals are called to praise God just like humans. In the Mark reading we heard that during his 40 days in the wilderness, Jesus was with the wild beasts; not killing them – he was with them. The kingdom of God, which Jesus came to usher in, includes animals. In the Kingdom of God animals and humans live together. So, let's see what this You Tube video GoD and DoG can teach us about living with one kind of animal – dogs.

{Show "GoD and DoG" video}

Singer-songwriter and artist Wendy Francisco lives in northern Colorado. Here's the story of behind her video. As told by Caroline Coleman in the Feb. 22, 2011 *Guideposts magazine*.

Wendy's marriage had been difficult and it ended in a painful divorce. Depression set in. She questioned her worthiness in God's eyes. "I knew that God still loved me, but my life had kind of caved in," she says. "After the divorce I thought I was no longer of any use to God."

In time Wendy emerged from this low time to find happiness again. "God restored everything," she says. "God never left me." Wendy eventually remarried and she regained equilibrium in her life. Wendy was a dog owner. Caspian was her big fluffy white Colorado mountain dog. One sunny spring afternoon in 2009 Wendy as she rushed out to run errands, Caspian stared up at her with an expression that said, *If it were up to me, I would never leave you.* As Wendy drove away she realized her dog's sweet look was saying what God would say: "I never leave you."

A few days later at dinner these words came to her: "I look up and I see God. I look down and see my dog." She dropped her fork, looked at her new husband Don and said, "I've got to write a song." Here's what she came back with, 45 minutes later:

I look up and I see God
I look down and see my dog

Simple spelling G.O.D
Same words backwards D.O.G

He would stay with me all day
I'm the one who walks away
But both of them just wait for me
and dance at my return in glee

Both love me no matter what
Divine God and canine mutt
I take it hard each time I fail
But God forgives, Dog wags his tail

God showed up and made the dog
Dog reflects a part of God
I've seen love from both sides now
It's everywhere, amen bow wow

I look up and I see God
I look down and see my dog
And in my human frailty
I can't match their love for me.

Wendy was so encouraged by the response she got when she first sang this in public, that she decided to share it on YouTube. She spent two intense days, including an all-nighter, working to create animation to go along with the song. The video went viral. Within a 40-day span, the video was viewed more than a million times. This seemingly simple song with a powerful message: God never leaves us. God is loyal to us and want to stay connected to us.

Here's what I hope you will take away this morning. You really can "come as you are" to this place. You don't have to dress up (not unless you want to – it's fine either way). More importantly you don't have to dress up or be anything other than who you really are. God meets us where we are. Sometimes our lives are in order, well organized; sometimes our lives are chaotic and messy. God's love for us is always there, in the order and the mess. God's Word meets us in our everyday lives through animals that bring us joy. God meets us in the digital world, in You Tube videos that contain the gospel message: that God loves us with an unconditional love. Love that is there for us no matter what.

We all need connection. Isn't that why these things {smart phones} have become so important in our lives is because they connect us to others? They connect us to our

friends, to the news, to the weather, to the world. When you see someone buried in their phone, neck curled over, thumbs working furiously, you are seeing someone seeking a connection. We all need to feel we are not alone; that we matter. Stay curious about what those people at the coffee shop, the theater, the restaurant, at work, on the street, are doing on their phones! Ask them! Your curiosity is a way of connecting with them.

We are all seeking a connection. By God's grace, dogs can remind us we are connected to a source of unconditional love. By God's grace a You Tube video can remind us we are connected to a fountain of love that never runs dry. By God's grace, we can come here each Sunday as we are, and be reminded we are loved unconditionally. Connection is what we do really well in this place. By God's grace we offer this kind of love to others. Here, we are all about staying connected to the one who loves us more than we will ever deserve.

*I look up and I see Good
I look down and see my dog
And in my human frailty
I can't match their love for me.*

Bow wow. Amen.