

# The Web of Creation

## Homily by Reverend Rebecca M. Bryan

September 10, 2023

(Rev. Rebecca calls the children forward to the front for the homily.)

**S**ometimes we are given very big tasks to do. Has that ever happened to you? Yea, me too.

Sometimes tasks we have to complete or concepts we have to explain can feel so big that it helps to simplify them by bringing them back to a more manageable size. At the start of a new school year the teachers might tell you everything you have to learn that year and all the big assignments that will be due, and you may have a new schedule, and your friends may be in different classes, or maybe you're even in a new school.

Times like that are when it helps to remember what matters and to keep it in the moment. It also helps to remember our connections, our friends and family, and our church; and look for opportunities to be kind because how we act matters. You matter. We all matter. Our words and actions make a difference.

Our ministry theme this year is interconnectedness. It is a big word and a big idea, because everything is interconnected. We are connected to dust mites, spiders, and butterflies. We are connected to our friends and family, our community, and this church. The more you think about, learn about, and feel interconnection, the bigger it becomes. It is a big truth with lots of implications, and a lot of things happen because of it.

So, to bring such a big concept down to a more manageable size, I want to start the year with a story. This is a classic story written 71 years ago by a man named Elwyn Brooks White. People called him E.B. White, and he lived in Maine among other places.

E.B. White wrote essays and important articles in many news publications, most notably *The New Yorker* and *Harper's Magazine*. He wrote pretty much about the same things: in defense of individual consciousness, freedom of the press, the rights of minorities, and world unity. He sounds like a Unitarian Universalist, doesn't he?

Though he wasn't UU, he greatly admired the work of a famous Unitarian named Henry David Thoreau and found peace and meaning in his writings.

In addition to his news writing and essays, E.B. White wrote three children's books: *Stuart Little*, *The Trumpet of the Swan*, and *Charlotte's Web*, which is the book I'm going to talk about for a few minutes.

How many of you know this story? Raise your hands. It's one of my favorites. It's a story about a child named Fern, a pig named Wilbur, a spider named Charlotte, and lots of other barn creatures and other people. On the surface it's a story about how Fern, and then Charlotte, save Wilbur's life. But let me tell you a secret: it's actually a story about interconnectedness. I think E.B. White knew that too!

It's a story about the interconnectedness of community, friendship, and love in action. It's a story about life that has three important lessons:

1. You are never alone.

We are surrounded by connections and community of all kinds.

2. We can always do something to help.

Words matter. Kindness may save someone's life.

3. Unlikely friends are some of the best.

Be open to friends wherever you go.

The story starts with Fern, an eight-year-old who loves animals and lives on a farm with her family. Fern learns that her father is planning to kill the runt of their newest litter of pigs. A runt of the litter is the smallest of the babies, and sometimes they don't get enough to eat. Fern puts her foot down and says, "No way are you killing this pig, just because he's little!"

She wraps the pig in a blanket, names him Wilbur, and feeds him with a bottle until he can eat on his own. After some months, Fern's father sells Wilbur to his brother, and Wilbur goes to live in a barnyard with other animals. Fern comes to

# The Web of Creation

September 10, 2023 page 2

visit him every day and becomes friends with all the other animals too, including the spider named Charlotte.

Well, it turns out that even with all the other animals around him, Wilbur was lonely. He wanted love, he wanted a friend. I'll tell you something: we all want a friend.

One day, the spider, Charlotte, talks to Wilbur and tells him that she will be his friend. "Do you want a friend, Wilbur? I'll be a friend to you. I've watched you all day and I like you."<sup>1</sup>

You are never alone. We are surrounded by connections, communities of all kinds. Wilbur appreciated the offer but wasn't so sure. He didn't like spiders.

"I've got a new friend...but what a gamble friendship is! Charlotte is fierce, brutal, scheming, bloodthirsty—everything I don't like. How can I learn to like her...?"<sup>2</sup>

Wilbur was merely suffering the doubts and fears that often go with finding a new friend. In time he was to discover that he was mistaken about Charlotte. Underneath her bold and cruel exterior, she had a kind heart, and she was to prove loyal and true to the very end.

Wilbur became friends with all the animals, the geese, the sheep, even the rat. Unlikely friends are some of the best. Be open to friends wherever you go.

One day they realize that Wilbur is still likely to be killed for meat after he got fat enough. This bothered all the animals, especially Wilbur, who didn't want that to happen. Charlotte decided she had to do something in her power to save Wilbur. She thought about who she was, what her talents and gifts were, and decided to write words into her spider web for the people who owned the barn to see. Then they would know how special Wilbur was! "People believe almost anything they see in print." Charlotte said.<sup>3</sup>

We can always do something to help. Words matter. Kindness may save someone's life. And

- 1 E.B. White, *Charlotte's Web*, copyright 1952, 31. Amen.
- 2 E.B. White, *Charlotte's Web*, 41.
- 3 White, 41.

she was right! People did believe what they saw written about Wilbur in the spider web. Charlotte wrote words in the web right over his stall in the barn. Over some months, she wrote: "Some Pig," "Terrific," "Radiant," and "Humble." People thought it was a miracle.

Not only did other people believe what Charlotte wrote, but Wilbur did too. Wilbur tried his best to be everything that Charlotte wrote about him. It wasn't too long before the people knew they could never kill Wilbur. He was too special!

Charlotte's words and actions mattered. They remind me of something Ralph Waldo Emerson, another Unitarian, once said: "You cannot do a kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late."

Well, time did go on, and Wilbur just kept getting more famous. He went to fairs, and people came from all over to see this special pig. Eventually Charlotte got older. One day she used her weaving talents to make a beautiful and strong sack, into which she put thousands of tiny spider eggs. This meant that even after she died, Wilbur would always have her babies or her grandbabies as his friends.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said something else about friendship that I believe is true: "The glory of friendship is...the spiritual inspiration that comes to one when you discover that someone else believes in you and is willing to trust you with a friendship."

I wonder if anyone has noticed anything different in the sanctuary today? (Rev. Rebecca points to the web in the upper corner of the sanctuary.) That is our web, a reminder of the truth of interconnectedness and three things:

You are never alone. We are surrounded by connections, communities of all kinds.

We can always do something to help. Words matter. Kindness may save someone's life.

Unlikely friends are some of the best. Be open to friends wherever you go.