

CLF GA Worship, America's Center. St. Louis MO, June 22, 2006

Reading (the Rev. Patty Franz)

Bill Bryson reading

From A Short History of Nearly Everything, pp. 397, 398, 415

If your two parents hadn't bonded just when they did—possibly to the second, possibly to the nanosecond—you wouldn't be here. And if their parents hadn't bonded in a precisely timely manner, you wouldn't be here either. And if their parents hadn't done likewise, and their parents before them, and so on, obviously and indefinitely, you wouldn't be here.

Push backwards through time and these ancestral debts begin to add up. Go back just eight generations to about the time that Charles Darwin and Abraham Lincoln were born, and already there are over 250 people on whose timely couplings your existence depends. ... At twenty generations ago, the number of people procreating on your behalf has risen to 1,048,576. ... By thirty generations ago, your total number of forebears—remember, these aren't cousins and aunts and other incidental relatives, but only parents and parents of parents in a line leading ineluctably to you—is over one billion (1,073,741,824, to be precise). ...

Clearly something has gone wrong with our math here. The answer, it may interest you to learn, is that your line is not pure. You couldn't be here without a little incest—actually quite a lot of incest—albeit at a genetically discreet remove. With so many millions of ancestors in your background, there will have been many occasions when a relative from your mother's side of the family procreated with some distant cousin from your father's side of the ledger. ... Indeed, if you look around you on a bus or in a park or café or any crowded place, *most* of the people you see are very probably relatives. ... Compare your genes with any other human being's and on average they will be about 99.9 percent the same. We are ... uncannily alike. ... In the most literal and fundamental sense we are all family.

It cannot be said too often: all life is one. That is, and I suspect will forever prove to be, the most profound true statement there is.