Presbytery of Genesee Valley

STATED MEETING

153 and Me—what do you mean by that?

by Moderator-elect Marcia Reiff

Ancestry testing has become quite popular. One such ancestry test uses the measure of 23 specific DNA markers to complete this test and is called *23andMe*. It can be used to identify ethnic and family histories, learn more about important health markers, and even, for those who explore more deeply, about shared traits such as being a morning person or preferring to sleep on the left side of the bed.

Traced back far enough, the prevailing theory is that at some point in history there is a shared ancestor for all humankind.

Scripture confirms this theory, although most of don't point to one human couple (named Adam and Eve) as the direct ancestors of every human being. There are many examples to remind us that there is one God and creator of all. In this way, we are all siblings, and in Jesus Christ, those who chose to become disciples are siblings in Christ. And Romans reminds us that God's work is the completion of a master plan that will restore all creation—the world and everything in it—as one people, with one faith and one baptism, one Lord and Savior of us all (whether we know it or not).

One story in the last chapter of the Gospel of John stands out: when Jesus meets with some of his followers on a beach in the hazy days between resurrection and ascension. They have been fishing all night and have caught nothing but a stranger approaches and suggests they throw the net out "on the other side." This turns their expectations upside down because "the other side" is also used to indicate when Jews cross over into Gentile or Samaritan territory, something Jesus often did during his earthly ministry. And then, after the ensuing miraculous catch is counted, we are told specifically that there were 153 fish.

Some scholars draw the correlation between this number and the after-resurrection encounter between Jesus and Peter as a different kind of sign—not the kind of sign that shows who Jesus is, but the kind that passes along the call to worldwide evangelism to those who will follow Jesus.

So, going out on a limb here, is it possible this passage is a similar ancestry test—reminding us that somewhere, if we trace it far enough, we all share a common ancestry in Jesus Christ, and a ministry that is not limited to any one group of people?

Not Jews or Gentiles, rich or poor, white, brown ,or black, not any specific nationality—but all. We are all connected.

In a time of great division, this passage serves as a reminder that while Jesus is not with us in body, through the Holy Spirit, the ministry of sharing the good news is for all.

I am convinced that God celebrates this diversity and calls us to seek common ground where possible, and when not, to speak the truth in love.