

## Creation Care Sermon September 17, 2023

All creation is a temple, says St. Gregory the Great. Every tree, stone, lizard, rabbit, meteor, comet, and star to us is holy. Amen

The Vietnamese Zen teacher, poet and activist Thich Nhat Hahn was once asked by environmental activists at a conference what they should do to save the earth from ecological devastation. After a long pause, he responded by saying that they needed to place their hands on the earth and listen to the cries of the world. This was an unexpected response. The activists were looking for something more strategic and action-oriented. Because he understood that the ecological crisis was arising out of a profound problem, Thich Nhat Hahn did not simply create a technical 'fix'. He recognized that the crisis stems from a deep disconnection with our love, respect and reverence for the natural world, for God's world. Rekindling that love and connection is the most powerful force for social action.

From September 1 to October 4, Christians around the world mark the Season of Creation, a relatively recent development in the liturgical calendar. The practice, which started in 1989, began to spread and eventually, the World Council of Churches promoted it as a new liturgical season. During these weeks, Christians are urged to recognize the theological centrality of God the Creator, Creation itself, the human vocation of caring for Creation, and doing justice on behalf of the Earth and all of her inhabitants. Each year Bishop Asbil designates this time in our liturgical calendar, encouraging us to focus on the theme of Creation Care. This week and next week, we will be doing that. One of the resources provided by the Diocese for this month that jumped out to me was the "Laudato Si Movement Prayer Book" written by a group of faithful

people who care deeply for God's creation. It is grounded in Holy Scripture, and is meant to be shared with anyone who wants to contemplate and be active in care of the earth and all its creatures. A section of the book has a set of daily prayers, each day focusing on a different part of creation. It is this section that we will experience this morning. It is an attempt to see the profound interconnectedness among all of the elements of God's Creation.

### **Light**

A reading from the first letter of John (1, 5-7)

Now this is the message that we have heard from him and proclaim to you: God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say, "We have fellowship with him" while we continue to walk in darkness, we lie and do not act in truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of his son Jesus cleanse us from all sin.

### **Reflection**

Enlightenment in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us, such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transit or car-pooling, plant trees and turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices. All of these reflect a generous and worthy creativity, which brings out the best in human beings.

But any conversion is not real, nor true, if it does not have a direct impact on the care for our world and a recognition that our actions impact all of creation. This impact is based on small actions that, multiplied by the constancy and conviction of many people, are capable of generating great changes. As Margaret Mead

said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed individuals can change the world. In fact, it's the only thing that ever has."

But as much as we need to turn off the lights, change to LEDs, we also need to live in the light of Christ. God created light and called it into existence. And through light we see the divine reflection of all creatures, for God penetrates everything with divine light. Is our relationship with creation a luminous relationship, one that respects and protects it so that God's light can shine, both in creation and in ourselves? Our definition of light needs to be seen as so much larger than a light bulb.

## **Water**

A reading from the book of Ezekiel (47: 3-9)

Going on eastward with a cord in his hand, the man measured one thousand cubits and then led me through the water, and it was ankle-deep. Again he measured one thousand and led me through the water, and it was knee-deep. Again he measured one thousand and led me through the water, and it was up to the waist. Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross, for the water had risen; it was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be crossed. He said to me, "Mortal, have you seen this?"

Then he led me back along the bank of the river. As I came back, I saw on the bank of the river a great many trees on the one side and on the other. He said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, and when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh. Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish once these waters reach there. It will become fresh, and everything will live where the river goes.

## Reflection

If stranded in the wilderness, you can live for at least 3 weeks without food, with having only water, but you can only live 3 days without water. Wilderness guides often refer to the “rule of 3”, which says that a person can live for 3 minutes without air (oxygen), 3 days without water, and 3 weeks without food. Clearly we are not going to last very long without water.

Even as the quality of available water is constantly diminishing, in some places there is a growing tendency, despite its scarcity, to privatize this resource, turning it into a commodity subject to the laws of the market. I see people walking out of Costco with cases of bottled water. I don't get it. Yes access to safer drinkable water is a basic and universal human right since it is essential to human survival. Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water because they are denied the right to a life consistent with the inalienable dignity. In our own country, the lack of potable water in our Indigenous communities is scandalous! And I know I am guilty of long showers and forgetting to turn off the water tap when brushing my teeth. This debt can be paid partly by an increase in funding to provide clean water and sanitary services among the poor. But water continues to be wasted, not only in the developed world, but also in developing countries, which possess it in abundance. This shows that the problem of water is partly an educational issue and partly a cultural issue, since there is little awareness of the seriousness of such behaviour within a context of great inequity.

And little awareness of the interconnectedness of humanity and safe drinking water. All of God's creation is impacted when there is a portion of us who do not have potable water.

God has created water and created it for everyone. From small springs, water flows over mountains and hills into the valleys to irrigate them and give life. All of life is based on water. That is why access to clean water is the fundamental right and the condition of all life on our blue planet. Water is for everyone and it is up to all of us to make it possible that the water we use can once again become clean so that it can continue to give life to all living things on the planet.

And just as water is the source of life, God has willed that this same water be the source of the baptismal renewal of all humanity in Christ. The waters of baptism launch our journey of life with Christ at the center guiding us to bring about God's kingdom here on earth.

## **Air**

A Reading from the Book of Wisdom (7: 1, 3-6)

I also am mortal like everyone else, a descendant of the first-formed child of earth, and in the womb of a mother I was molded into flesh. And when I was born, I began to breathe the common air and fell upon the kindred earth; my first sound was a cry, as is true of all. I was nursed with care in swaddling cloths. For no king has had a different beginning of existence; there is for all one entrance into life and one way out.

## **Reflection**

The spirit or breath of life dwells in every living creature and calls us to enter into relationship with him. As the air we breathe fills the whole earth, so the spirit of God, God's vital breath, is present in all of creation. But the air on earth is not in good shape. Did you know anyone affected by the fires out west back in August? My cousin was saying they could hardly breathe with the smoke and had to evacuate. Any although my stepdaughter didn't have to evacuate, the

smoke was everywhere making breathing difficult. The United Nations Environmental program reports air pollution is the greatest environmental threat to public health globally and accounts for an estimated 7 million premature deaths every year. Even though air pollution is a global problem, it disproportionately affects those living in developing nations and particularly the most vulnerable, such as women, children and the elderly. Twice when I have returned from travels in a developing country, I have ended up on a puffer because of lung infections.

God is present in nature through God's Spirit, and nature manifests God and praises God's glory. Nothing is hidden from God's gaze, from God's presence, from God's care. The air is that element that best expresses the divine way of being in creation...and in turn, as the air is unconfined, so God also escapes our will of possession and control. Are we going to let the air, a wonderful expression of the presence of God, become corrupted and hinder it from being the bellows that sustain life?

## **Earth**

A reading from the book of Genesis (1: 9-11)

And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so.

## Reflection

Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years. Yet we are called to be instruments of God so that our planet might be what God desired when he created it and correspond with his plan for peace, beauty and fullness. The problem is that we still lack the culture needed to confront this crisis. We lack leadership capable of striking out on new paths and meeting the needs of the present with concern for all and without prejudice towards coming generations. And we have forgotten that whatever harm we do to the earth is harm done to ourselves.

The earth is the support of our common home. It is where we should have our feet. Created by God for all, to serve God's project of peace, beauty and fullness of all creatures, we are turning it into a desert, a place where it will not be possible to live. By polluting it, we take away its fertilizing and food producing power; by turning it into a desert, we mute its beauty; by heating it, we break the equilibrium that made possible the birth of life after million of years. If we are incapable of thinking of ourselves, let us at least think of future generations whose future we are mortgaging even before they are born. Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return. This speaks to the unity we humans have with all the earth. By virtue of this deep unity, not caring for the earth also means not caring for ourselves. The outer deserts are entering our lives turning our souls into deserts; we incorporate the wastes that provoke the outer deserts. All because we live anchored in the great interior deserts of our souls, alien to the face of Christ who awaits our integral conversion to revive springs of living water in us that can regenerate our interior and exterior deserts.

## **Living Beings**

A reading from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians (15: 38-41)

But God gives a seed a body as he has chosen and to each kind of seed, its own body. Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun and another glory of the moon and another glory of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in glory.

## **Reflection**

It is not good enough to think of different species merely as potential “resources” to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves. Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see because they have been lost forever. Many are part of a natural evolution, but the great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence.

The immensity, magnificence and greatness of God are made present to us in the perfume of a flower, in the melodious song of a bird, in the majesty of a lion, in plants and animals created by God, that speak to us of God. Protecting natural species is a very high form of caring for our common home. The multiplication of species, willed by God as described in Genesis, helps to spread the praise of God to all the ends of the earth.

## **Humankind**

A reading from Colossians (2: 8-10)

Watch out that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental principles of the world,



and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority.

## **Reflection**

In order to become a creature, God chose to become human. One person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross. Christ is the Son of God made human for us and in whom the fullness of the divinity dwells bodily. In this way, all of creation, through the human creature, has entered into the very mystery of God. To this extent, God loves the handiwork of creation; to the point of renewing it and inserting it into the heart of the divine mystery. Does our love of creation resemble God's love of creation? If not, let us fix our gaze on Christ so that we may be converted.

Light, water, air, earth, living beings, and us, human kind—the interconnectedness of life. It is all holy. We are intertwined with all of creation the living and non-living. And the power of God is present in all of it. Any good that we do impacts the cosmos and any harm that we do, also impacts the cosmos. We cannot separate ourselves from each other or the elements of creation. We have been charged as stewards of God's world and as such it is incumbent upon us to recognize how our actions impact this wonderful gift we have been given to live in.

Way back in 2010 our very own Phyllis Creighton wrote a letter to the Anglican Journal, part of which bears repeating for us today:

“Should we shun climate change as a politically rife debate? Not if we stand in awe at the wonder and beauty of Earth as God's creation. Not if we understand

and accept our responsibility as Christians to care for Earth and its creatures by stewardship, and to live in love, justly, with our brothers and sisters around the world already suffering impacts from global warming.”

In August of this year, the World Council of Churches reported on a new study published in the journals “The Lancet” and “Child Abuse and Neglect” co-authored by the World Council of Churches, which highlights the alarming impact of climate change on the health and wellbeing of children.

“This study underscores the urgent need to recognize that inadequate responses to the climate emergency pose a profound ethical concern affecting every aspect of the rights, physical and emotional wellbeing of children,” said Frederique Seidel, World Council of Churches’ senior advisor on child rights.

“As people of faith, we are called to tackle the root causes of the climate emergency, as an urgent measure for protecting children from the dire consequences of a warming world.”

In his book “Bioregions: The Context for Reinhabiting the Earth”, Thomas Berry wrote: “The most difficult transition to make is from an anthropocentric (all about ourselves) to a biocentric (all about the earth) norm of progress. If there is to be any true progress, then the entire life community must progress. Any progress of the human at the expense of the larger life community must ultimately lead to a diminishment of human life itself.”

So if you thought you were of an age where you could put up your feet and relax with a gin and tonic and watch the news—think again. Until the God’s creation is loved and adored and cared for by all of us, there is work to be done.

But there is more to it than just actions. In his book *Moth Snowstorm*, Michael McCarthy says, “It’s time for a different formal defence of nature. We should offer up not just the notion of being sensible and responsible about it, which is sustainable development, nor just the notion of its mammoth utilitarian and financial value, which is ecosystem services, but a third way, something different entirely: we should offer up what it means to our spirits; the love of nature. We should offer up its joy, its delight, and be grateful.”

Amen