

Acts 8:26-40  
1 John 4:7-21  
John 15:1-8  
Psalm 22:24-30

April 29, 2018

Celebrating Earth Day.

“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep while a wind from God swept over the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. Then God created the dome in the midst of the waters, the waters under the sky, the lights in the dome, swarms of living creatures in the waters, the birds of the air, living creatures to roam the earth, and finally God created humankind. God blessed them and all that he had made. He told the humans to be fruitful and multiply and ordered them to have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth. And it was so. And God saw everything that God had made and indeed it was very good.” – Genesis 1:1-31 (paraphrased)

What I’ve just read to you is of course taken from the Book of Genesis. It is a condensed and paraphrased excerpt from Genesis that tells the story of creation; a story that many of us have heard and come to love. Today, our liturgy is focused on lifting up and honoring the beautiful creation that God has made and given to us to care for – this beautiful earth – which we Episcopalians sometimes refer to as this fragile earth and our island home. Today’s focus is an extension of Earth Day which was technically celebrated last Sunday, but your Worship Committee and Youth & Family Committee felt that it was important that we honor the gift of creation that God has freely given to us to enjoy but more importantly to care for with intentional commitment.

This story from Genesis which tells an understandable version of an undoubtedly complex creation story, reminds me of a time in my life when I experienced an aspect of creation that was nothing short of breathtaking.

In June of 2008, I had the privilege of visiting Alaska and enjoyed everything from seeing whales fly out of the cold ocean waters to experiencing the glaciers within Glacier Bay and finally having the opportunity to experience Denali National Park with sightings of incredible wildlife and a glimpse of the summit at Mount McKinley. On this trip, we were fortunate enough to zip line through an Alaskan rain forest, canoe through glacial waters, hike upon the glaciers themselves, and even take a ride on a dog sled at the Iditarod Training site. It really was an incredible and magical visit. On our last day in Alaska, my traveling companions and I decided to get off the beaten path a bit and experience things that weren’t part of the typical Alaskan tourist experience. We decided to rent some canoes and paddle up what I believe was the Chena River. It was great fun, especially because we were up able to paddle past homes and farms that wouldn’t have been seen from any guided tour. But one thing that really took me by surprise was seeing rusty old cars, discarded home appliances, old farm equipment and other junk that was embedded in the riverbanks of the Chena River. I was astonished to see what

looked like a flagrant disregard for the sanctity of a living river. The discarded junk and automotive wreckage embedded in the riverbank was set in stark contrast to the natural beauty that I had seen throughout the previous week. I have since come to learn that the discarded autos and metal appliances that were compacted into the riverbank was an outdated (and in my opinion) terrible way to prevent riverbank erosion. At the time, I suppose the intentions at erosion prevention were meant to be good, but certainly the lasting effects of rusting cars and old dented appliances on our nations rivers have continued to impact the quality of the water and the ecosystems that are impacted by that rusty presence.

Here at home in Vermont, you don't have to look too far to see similar actions by thoughtless people who sometimes dump their trash or garbage along roadways or even next to reservoirs meant to provide clean drinking water for people in our municipalities. All one has to do is take a walk around Berlin Pond just down the road from here, and you might see trash or even a discarded propane tank that has been thrown down into a ravine. Last fall, someone who lives near me in Williamstown, decided to clean out their house and leave an old air conditioner and an aging microwave on the corner of Stone and Getz Roads. The microwave disappeared before the winter snows, but as the snows receded in these past weeks, the air conditioner was still there. It infuriates me that this kind of disregard for our planet is demonstrated all the time and that other people have to clean up and take responsibility for another person's lazy actions.

Earlier this week, French President Emmanuel Macron addressed a joint session of the US congress by speaking on the topics of global stewardship and on nuclear threats in the Middle East. In his address to congress regarding his concerns of our planet Macron said: "By polluting the oceans, not mitigating CO2 emissions, and destroying our biodiversity we are killing our planet. Let us face it, there is no Planet B. And I am sure one day the United States will come back and join the Paris Agreements. And I'm sure we can work together to fulfil with you the ambition of the Global Pact on the Environment."

In my opinion, President Macron is speaking truth and I believe he represents many, many people in this world who have concerns over climate change, global warming, and who have an earnest desire to save our planet that is the only earthly home we will ever know. In this morning's gospel passage from John, Jesus reminds us of our interconnectedness in all aspects of life on this planet. First, we are connected to God who is represented in today's gospel story as the vine grower. Next, we are connected through Jesus who is the vine that is cultivated and nurtured by God the vine grower and who is also intimately connected with each one of us. And because of the unconditional love that comes from the gracious heart of God, Jesus reminds us, that as living branches we are called to bear the fruit of stewardship and care for all of creation. Fruit that will bring benefit and vitality to all the aspects of life that surround us: to our fellow brothers and sisters, to our local communities, and to our interconnected and global world.

So, on this day when we celebrate and give thanks to God for this fragile earth our island home, what does it mean to bear fruit and to give back? Well, let me offer you a few suggestions:

First, we must remember that bearing fruit and caring for the creation around us begins with me. Perhaps on my way home today, I might stop and pick up that discarded air conditioner and dispose of it properly as I had hoped the original owner would have done. If not me, then who else will do it? Perhaps that's a question we can all ask of ourselves. If not me, then who?

Next, you have an opportunity to give back, too. Today, your Worship and Liturgy Committee is providing you with some live Blue Spruce saplings to plant in your yard as a way to give back to the earth. These saplings were purchased from the Redrock Christmas Tree Farm in Chelsea, VT. Redrock Farm is owned by the son-in-law of the late Jean Peterson, a beloved member of this parish, who had a love for plants and flowers and who planted them generously as a way to celebrate life and give back to the world. These saplings can be planted in honor of Jean and in memory of her ministry of giving back to the earth through the planting of living things.

There are other ways in which you can help the planet out right here at Christ Church. Next Saturday is Green Up Day in Vermont; the first Saturday in May. I would be very grateful if a team of volunteers were to come out and rake our front lawn, pick up sticks and trash in our flower beds and planter areas in the courtyard, and perhaps sweep up behind the church by the rear entrance to the Parish Hall. We don't have very many good rakes, so if you come, please bring one from home and I will be here to help out, too. I hope a good number of folks can give up some Saturday time to help green up our home.

Beyond the opportunities I've just mentioned, there are a few other opportunities that you might also consider. Thanks to Vermont Interfaith Power and Light, we have several real ways in which you can contribute to improving our world and perhaps even by saving yourself a little bit of money. Vermont Interfaith Power and Light works collaboratively with Efficiency Vermont, and because of this joint venture, Efficiency Vermont is offering free home energy audits from one of their home energy experts. These home energy visits consist of a visual assessment of your home with complete suggestions that can help you save money on heating and also by reducing your carbon footprint. Beyond what you might do at home, VT Interfaith Power and Light has also provided us with postcards to send to our senators letting them know how important it is to take action on climate change. Additionally, there are opportunities for you to express your conviction that "we're still in Paris" and that we will do our very best to continue protecting creation by supporting the tenets of the Paris Climate Accord.

On the night when Jesus instructed his disciples to "bear much fruit" he did so knowing that he was about to come to the end of his life. He knew that he had run out of time and now he had to trust that all the teaching he shared with his disciples would somehow pay off and become the fruit of his efforts. In an intimate and poignant final conversation, Jesus told his disciples that his followers were not only his students or servants, but instead, that they are his friends. In a moment of tenderness, Jesus revealed to his friends that they didn't simply find Jesus by accident, or coincidence but instead, that Jesus chose them with intentionality. And as Jesus chose those first intentional friends to continue bearing the fruit of His life-giving ministry then, Jesus calls to us to also continue in that same life-giving, life affirming ministry in our time and in our day. Let us pray:

Gracious God, your amazing love extends through all time and space, to all parts of your creation, which you created and called good. You made a covenant with Noah and his family, putting a rainbow in the sky to symbolize your promise of love and blessing to every living creature, and to all successive generations. You made a covenant with Abraham and Sarah, blessing them and their descendants throughout the generations. You made a covenant with Moses and the Israelite people to all generations, giving them the 10 commandments and challenging them to choose life. In Jesus, you invite us to enter into a new covenant, in communion with all who seek to be faithful to you.

As people of faith, we are called into covenant. Your covenant of faithfulness and love extends to the whole creation. We pray for the healing of the earth, that present and future generations may enjoy the fruits of creation, and continue to glorify and praise you. In your holy name we pray, Amen.

—Prayer from the National Council of Churches