

## Kirk of Bonnie Brae talk 4/19/09

“What are we waiting for?”—St. Paul to the Romans

“The entire creation is groaning as it waits for the revealing of God’s children”...

“we ourselves groan inwardly with sighs too deep for words ... as we wait for the redemption of our bodies”

Wow! What an image St. Paul paints of the reality of our spiritual and physical interconnectedness with all the rest of creation, and of the painful labor it will take for us to claim our identity as children of God. I choose the words “painful labor” intentionally, for that is what the words Paul uses is referring to-- the labor of childbirth.

The universe is in labor, straining to give birth to a new reality, a new community of beings in which human kind plays a pivotal role! It’s like the community of beings for which the universe was created has been gestating in the womb of the cosmos, waiting for the moment when humankind’s spiritual development has progressed to the point where we are ready to become the moral consciousness of the universe, the guardians of the ecological balance which has given and sustains our life.

We can almost hear the creation groaning, crying out to us, trying to reach us with its message-- to be a child of God is to be one with creation, and to honor our place as part of creation. We are part of creation, meaning we are also creatures. We are part of the wonderful, beautiful, intricate web of creation. But we have forgotten who we are. However, if we listen, we can hear the groans, not just of the non-human creatures, but of humankind also suffering under the weight of our ecological sin. As Jesus said so many times, “those who have ears, let them hear”.

But our ears have been stopped up. For too long, now, we, humankind, has pretended that we are somehow different from the rest of creation, that we have a status above and outside of creation, and therefore have the ability, privilege, and right to treat the creation as if is only a means to our ends, something for us to exploit in a utilitarian fashion for our own perceived benefit.

The word for this day is that we have been deceived, once again.

We have fallen prey to the same deceit as did our first ancestors in this garden-- we have been deceived into believing that we are like God, and can use the knowledge of good and evil to create our own separate destiny apart from the intent of the creator and apart from the rest of the creatures with whom we share this earth, as if we are not also totally dependent on the earth and its creatures for our well-being, as if we could create a world of well-being for ourselves without being concerned for the well-being of every other creature. That is a deception, one that is unraveling before our eyes as we see the web of life beginning to unravel before our eyes.

We are living on borrowed time. The creation will suffer our deprivations only so long before it rebels against them. Are we so naïve as to believe that we cannot with our technological prowess significantly affect the balance of the ecology on which we are dependent? Even in the Genesis story God warns that the health of

the earth and our own welfare are inextricably linked, that the earth is responsive, even vulnerable, to our activity. How many parables about stewardship did Jesus tell, warning about the fate of those who do not exercise faithful stewardship? “What they have will be taken away from them and given to others, and they will be cast out, and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Are we so arrogant as to believe that the creation would not go on without us? Could God not raise up other children to take our place were we to perish at our own hands?

Almost 40 years ago, the very first Earth Day was observed as people began to hear the whimperings of the earth in response to our assault upon it. In those 40 years, have we really listened, have we changed, have we repented?

What does it mean for us to repent, to change direction, to re-discover our identity as children of God and humbly take our true place in the web of creation? We have to rid ourselves of the false

idea that we have domination over the earth as our birthright, and instead embrace the idea of dominion, of stewardship, of caretaking. That's what the words in Genesis about our proper role within creation mean. We are to care for the earth, not exploit it, tend it, not ravish it. Since we are part of it, we cannot care for ourselves without caring for the earth. As Chief Seattle is reported to have said, "We did not create the web of life, we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves."

We have to learn a new way of life which embodies a very different value system than the one we have been sold – I mean literally, sold—and to which we have become addicted, which is called consumption. Isn't it interesting that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century consumption was a fatal disease, whereas now it is a way of life, but no less fatal, as we are starting to learn. We have been taught—deceived-- into believing that meaning and happiness are to be found in consumption. But the truth is, that way of life is all-consuming, and will consume us in the end. The

true way of life, as Jesus was trying to teach us, is the way of community, of living for the common good, of reverence for creation as the true worship of the creator. The life of consumption is only a poor, and dead-end substitute for the life of community, and what we are learning now is that it is not just a human family, a human community that we must understand ourselves to be part of, but rather a community of all living creatures, including the earth. For one can make the case that the earth itself is a living organism, with a circulatory system, a respiratory system, a digestive and waste system, even a nervous system. Our calling as humans is to be part of the nervous system, to perceive, understand, appreciate, and cultivate the beauty of the creation. Instead, we have been acting more like a cancer virus. And like a cancer virus, if our host dies, we die too. So it's time for us to start acting more like T-cells, seeking out the sources of infection and cleaning them up before we are overcome by it.

OK, so let's get real. There are any number of serious threats to the survival of the environment on which we depend. There is climate change, of course. There is the mass extinctions occurring around the globe as the result of various human activities, from fishing to corporate farming to deforestation to unchecked urban sprawl. There is genetic engineering. There is the threat from manufactured toxicants that now find their way into every ecological niche, and eventually into our food, water, and air and the bodies of our children. Any one of these threats could do us in. But for myself, I think the most immediate and severe is the threat of climate change. The information I receive from people and organizations I trust says we have a very limited amount of time, in the range of a few decades, maybe as little as one decade, to start making drastic changes in the way we extract, produce, and consume the earth's resources, especially its energy resources.

The earth's eco-system is one vast, intricate, finely tuned energy-recycling system. All the energy we have in whatever form can be

traced back to the sun. All life, and even all non-living activity on the earth, even the wind and the waves, depends on the sun's energy. All life on earth exists because it has learned how to harness and recycle that energy. Remember the first law of thermodynamics—energy can neither be created nor destroyed, it can only be transformed. When we burn fossil fuels, we are not creating energy. We are just taking the sun's energy that had previously been turned into living material and then sequestered in the earth, and turning it back into heat energy. That stuff had been sequestered in the earth for a reason-- because it had to be in order for the temperature of the earth to remain hospitable to life as we know it. So now here we are putting that energy back into the atmosphere-- how could it not cause it to warm? It's simple physics.

Now the earth is sending us a message. We have to stop. We have to stop our exploitive, wasteful practices which treat the earth as if its resources were infinite, and as if we were not ourselves part of

that intricately balanced web. And the thing is, we know how!  
We have the knowledge how to get the energy we need from sources other than carbon-based fuels. It's not a matter of technology-- it's a spiritual matter, a matter of our will to give up our wasteful, careless ways and commit to discovering how better to live in balance and harmony with the earth and its life-supporting systems. It a matter of repentance, of recovering the spiritual values that are fundamental to our faith-- reverence, thrift, compassion, cooperation, sharing, moderation-- those values which nurture and sustain a healthy human community as well as a community of all beings. The earth is not here just for us and for our convenience. In the creation story, God proclaims the earth "good" for its own sake before humans appear on the scene. A case can be made that God created humans so that someone else could share in God's appreciation for the beauty and wonder of it, and be partners with God in caring for and nurturing that beauty.

So it's time for us to repent, to change direction, to embrace our vocation as caretakers, as stewards of creation. There are many, many ways in which we can and need to change our habits. A good place, and maybe the most urgent place to start is with our use of energy resources. We can be advocates for wise energy stewardship, in our own homes, in our churches, in our workplaces, schools, and governments. It will not be easy.

Childbirth is not easy. It takes a lot of work, and even pain. But as soon as the child is born, the pain of labor is overshadowed by the joy of new life, life not in a society based on consumption, but life in a community based on living together sustainably and gratefully on the only earth we have. I think that's the kind of community Jesus was trying to teach us about. As Paul is saying in Romans, That's what is waiting for us. The question is, "What are we waiting for?"