

20 April 2008 - Easter 5
Acts 7:55-60 – Psalm 31:1-5,15-16 – 1 Peter 2:2-10 – John 14:1-14

April 22nd, this Tuesday, is Earth Day. We don't celebrate many non-church holidays in the church ... but given that we are people who believe in God the creator, **and** that the intention of Earth Day is to *inspire awareness of and appreciation for the Earth's environment*,¹ it seems wholly appropriate for us to embrace this celebration of creation.

Now in full disclosure I have to say that as a child of the 1960's and 70's, I have been steeped in an awareness of creation – and in particular, the delicate relationship between creation and humans – my whole life. As far back as I can remember, there was talk of air and water pollution ... and a generally growing awareness that some of our energy sources were finite.

I clearly remember being in the car with my family one evening when I was 7 or 8. The sun was setting and I said something about the beautiful colors in the sky. My scientist dad – always a teacher whether at home or at work – took the opportunity to explain to us that the beautiful colors in the sky were in fact caused by light reflecting off the dirt particles in the air ... in other words, sunsets were colorful because of air pollution. I can still remember how it felt to hear that ... my heart sank.

Another on-going topic of conversation in those years, was the exponential increase in the earth's population and the related concern about the ability of the earth to sustain so many people. The first large famine shown in living color on TV, one that happened to be in Ethiopia, occurred during my confirmation years. About the same time, a movement began encouraging people to eat more simply, and to eat foods lower on the food chain, a pre-cursor to the availability in our present day, of organic foods and farmer's markets.

When I was in 6th grade we had to do a project that somehow portrayed the future. I don't remember many details ... what I **do** remember was the hollow feeling that grew inside me as we worked on a project focusing on the possibility that there might not be enough clean drinking water to go around by the time I had children of my own.

¹ Wikipedia

Add to all this the persistent looming threat of nuclear war as the US and the former Soviet Union fought for power. More than anything ... what I absorbed during those years was an awareness that the earth and all creation was fragile – fragile enough that we humans could *destroy* it – either with a push of a button, or our overuse of its resources.

Some thirty years later, I wake most mornings to the news, and it seems not much has changed.

For example, one morning this week I heard a story about relief agencies struggling to find grain for countries in need of food relief, a struggle compounded by the fact that many farmers have switched to growing grain for the booming bio-fuel industry.² That night, I heard about a show soon to air on the National Geographic Channel aiming to concretely demonstrate the amount of certain food items the average person in the US consumes in a lifetime.³

The next day I checked the headlines on BBC's web site and found these: *Global food system needs to change. China now top carbon polluter. Pneumonia linked to pollution. Forecast for big sea level rise. World Bank concerned over rising food prices around the world.* All those headlines were on one day.

Some days we hear about global warming in general ... or opening new areas for oil exploration ... or how to produce affordable alternate energy resources. All the while we are encouraged to reduce, reuse, recycle ... to ride public transportation to work one day a week ... to turn down the heat in winter and turn on fans instead of air conditioning in summer. The beginning of hurricane season leads to speculation again, of the increased number or intensity of storms. And the news is full of accounts of droughts in new places and old, and the famines that result.

Whether or not you knew the ecological crisis of the 1960's and 70's, today's stories demand our attention, beg us to pay attention to the fragility of creation ... and in particular, to the delicate nature of our relationship with creation. These stories bring to our awareness in a way we cannot and must not ignore ... our capacity to destroy creation, as well as our utter dependence on the gifts of this good earth.

² NPR

³ ABC News

All week we hear the bad news of a troubled world. Not just news of a fragile creation to be sure, for we also hear news of a troubled world in which war and violence and injustice ... death and illness and loneliness ... continue unabated.

At times like these, it is good, oh so good ... that we are people of faith ... and people of faith whose first *language* of faith is scripture, the living word of a living God. So what living word do we hear?

Today we hear Jesus describe to his disciples the nature of his relationship with God.

Though Thomas and Philip seem to be working hard to grasp the meaning of what Jesus is saying, the words themselves are quite clear. Jesus says:

If you know me, you will know the Father.

Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father.

I am in the Father, and the Father is in me.

Jesus is describing a relationship of deep intimacy. Jesus and God are in fact one and the same. If you see or know one, you see and know the other, for they exist in each other.

What is most startling, most wondrous about this description, is that Jesus is also inviting – drawing the disciples and us – into this very same relationship of deep intimacy. Jesus says he is going to prepare a place in God's house. He promises to come and take us to himself, so that where Jesus is – where God is – we may also be. We are not being invited to a *place*, so much as we are being invited and drawn into a *relationship* – a way of being ... intimately connected to God.

Here is the link to Earth Day ...

... because of our intimate connection to God, who is the Creator, we are also intimately connected to creation. Not just as stewards or caretakers of all God has created, but as people who our selves were created by God and are a manifestation of creation itself.

We are inextricably bound to this earth in ways both mundane and mysterious.

We need what the earth provides for our daily living, true. Yet even more important, because we – the earth and us – are created by the same Creator God,

we are divinely and mysteriously connected to creation. We are relatives. We are part of the same ecosystem. One is not whole without the other.

The ramifications of this are enormous. We are no longer talking about saving the earth because that is what good stewards do.

Instead, fully grasping the extent to which God's creation is intertwined, we shift to recognizing that when we live in ways that hurt the earth, we hurt ourselves, and we hurt the one who created us. The connection is that real.

And because the connection is that real, it goes the other way too.

To the extent that we care for creation, to the extent that we care for our relationship with God and our relationship with others, we strengthen that which binds us all together.

If you came this morning not liking the news of the week. If you came this morning discouraged to think that the ecological crisis news of yesterday is still being recycled today, Jesus says to you, *do not let your hearts be troubled*.

For we are not alone on this great spinning planet. And not only are we not alone, we have the promise that the Creator of the universe draws us closer with each breath. Amen.

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