

SUNDAY, APRIL 7, 2013
ENVIRONMENTAL SUNDAY
PSALM 104
RECOVERING THE BLESSING

Rev. Adrienne Carr

Last Sunday, Peter introduced his sermon by announcing that Spring is here because the pond behind his home has come back to life with little fishies and ducks and Lou, the turtle. I also have an announcement. The ground is defrosting, the sap is running and ants have once again taken residence in my kitchen. I just wish that they would have the courtesy to do the dishes.

Many years ago one April morning when I was a child, I was home sick from school. It was a mild morning with an April shower falling. My mother opened the window and I breathed in what will always be for me, the scent of Spring. I lay on the bed, captivated by the freshness of the breeze and the aroma of wet earth responding to the rain. That moment will always remain among my precious memories. I guess that is so because it was my first awareness of the sweetness of nature; the miracle of renewed life. If ever in my life, I was in mystical communion with God's glorious creation, it was during that moment. In absolute peace, I fell asleep in the midst of that seasonal miracle.

It is Spring again. It is April. Will our spring and summer be gentle or will the phenomenal power of nature cry out in the terrible pain that is manifest in thrashing tornadoes, fierce hurricanes, droughts and floods? That April, so long ago, I was sick; probably with a fever and sore throat. Now nature is sick with a spiking fever that can only be controlled by cooling. Each one of us, all of us on planet earth must find ways to collectively provide that cooling relief. There is no miracle drug, there is only collective human commitment to bring the temperature down. These next weeks of 4/1 Earth are a small way for us to work together as a community of faith to take a small step toward cooling our beloved patient, our mother earth.

Many of you know that Psalm 104 is one of my favorites. The author expanded the poetry of Genesis One into a glorious word picture of God's original blessing: "God saw everything that he had made and, indeed, it was very good." In the psalmist's vision, the words of Genesis are broadened and enriched. Psalm 104 describes the places inhabited by all the trees, bushes, waters, birds and animals. The psalm sets boundaries. Day and night. Sky and earth. Water and land. Animals and humans.

In Genesis One, according to its author, the final command by God is that humans are to "fill the earth and subdue it ...and have dominion over every living thing." The Psalmist, on the other hand, has an egalitarian sense of creation. The human community is not placed above all other living creature. Just as animals and birds and whales know their place in creation, so, too does humanity. The psalmist writes: "The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God. When the sun rises, they withdraw and lie down in their dens. People go out to work and to their labor until evening."

I do not imply that the reality of millennia ago should be our reality today. What I do draw from this psalm is a sense of balance that in humanity has been eroding through untold generations of expansion and domination. Pliny the Elder, a naturalist, who died in 79 A.D. was quite aware of the danger and commented:

Such is the audacity of man, that he hath learned to counterfeit Nature, yea, and is so bold as to challenge her in her work.

Much more recently, an equally brilliant scientist named Albert Einstein reflected:

A human being is part of the whole, called by us "Universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest - a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole [of] nature in its beauty. ~Albert Einstein, 1950

And I would be remiss if I did not share a comment by one of our beloved commentators, Art Buchwald who wrote in 1970:

And Man created the plastic bag and the tin and aluminum can and the cellophane wrapper and the paper plate, and this was good because Man could then take his automobile and buy all his food in one place and He could save that which was good to eat in the refrigerator and throw away that which had no further use. And soon the earth was covered with plastic bags and aluminum cans and paper plates and disposable bottles and there was nowhere to sit down or walk, and Man shook his head and cried: "Look at this Godawful mess."

As much as I love Genesis One, I am convinced that the 'go forth and dominate' theme has inflicted humanity with a deadly virus. Oh, it has taken years to become fully manifest but today, we are all infected. But there are things that we can do to begin the healing process. When I say 'we' I mean each family, each community, each nation. I mean the world community. And everywhere, there is, at last, a recognition of the extreme danger that we all face, so although, little, may be too late, there are efforts to bring healing to our poor world.

Recently those efforts have been undertaken in all parts of the world. A website called GreatNewsNetworking.org monitors positive environmental actions in, what I would name, actions of hope. I share a few of these with you.

The Government of China, the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases, is taking a step toward control in levying a tax on carbon emissions.

Electricity supplied from a new wind farm is cheaper than that from a new gas or coal-fired power plant in Australia, reports a new analysis published by Bloomberg New Energy Finance.

According to the BBC More than 140 countries have agreed on a set of legally binding measures to curb mercury pollution, at UN talks.

According to AFP Deforestation of Brazil's Amazon has slowed for a fourth consecutive year to its lowest rate since authorities began monitoring the world's largest rainforest.

According to Triple Pundit employing a new tertiary wastewater treatment process reduced levels of phosphorous and trace pollutants in urban wastewater effluent below EPA safe levels, researchers from Veolia Water, Kruger and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee found. This gives us hope that dead areas in the world's oceans may have a resurrection.

According to MSNBC By now, it's hardly news when a city bans plastic bags at checkout counters -- but an entire state? That's happened in Hawaii, where Honolulu County has joined the state's three other counties to give Hawaii a first-in-the-nation title.

In small and in great ways, businesses, scientists, governments and individuals voters are taking small but progressive steps to begin the process of healing.

John Muir, the great naturalist once said,

When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world. It is for us to tug and to understand.

We, the religious community, the most aware and accepting of the sacredness of creation have a prophetic as well as a life saving role to play. During this Easter Season, we are invited to affirm the new beginnings that are central to the Mystery of the Resurrection. 4/1 Earth is a hands on opportunity for each of us to begin within our small community that will be joined with the efforts off our sister communities throughout the UCC to restore the balance that the Psalmist envisioned. This time is a gift that we give gladly to our world in joyful affirmation of those last words of Genesis, "And behold, it was very good." We do this so in a future time, a young child, inhaling the sweetness of an April morning, will know that, indeed, it is very good.