

EARTH DAY (AND BAPTISM)

A few years ago we did a pack trip in Yellowstone with some friends. As we pitched our tent in a big meadow, we discovered to our delight that a pack of wolves was living right across the river just a couple of hundred yards away. We were there for about three days, and we'd watch them with our binoculars during the day, and hear them howl at night. There's nothing quite like the sound of a wolf howling in the wilderness at night. It gives me chicken skin now just thinking about it. I had the most amazing feeling of being connected to those magnificent creatures. There's nothing quite like the feeling of being connected to a wild animal.

When it was time to pack up our horses and leave, the wolves, who were normally silent during the day, began howling at us, as if they were saying goodbye. It was absolutely uncanny. Don't tell me there's no spiritual connection between us and the animals, between us and all of creation.

Today on this beautiful spring day, along with welcoming these new Christians into the Body of Christ, we're also celebrating Earth Day. The first Earth Day was in 1970, 47 years ago, and every year since then on the Sunday closest to April 22 we've been celebrating Earth Day. Over 1 billion people around the world now participate in Earth Day activities each year, making it the largest civic observance in the world. With teach-ins, science marches, celebrations, town hall meetings, clean-ups, tree plantings, renewable energy fairs, youth competitions, and much more. Although really, just like Mother's Day, every day should be Earth Day, shouldn't it.

In that passage we just heard from the book of Job, Job says:

“... ask the animals, and they will teach you;

the birds of the air, and they will tell you;

ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;

and the fish of the sea will declare to you.

Who among all these does not know

that the hand of the Lord has done this?

In his hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.”

Those wolves brought home to me an important lesson, how we are all closely linked in God’s creation to all living things, and all living things have a part in God’s economy. In Baptism we become members of the Body of Christ, one with all Christians everywhere. As St. Paul reminds us, “... in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ...There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” What unites us as creatures of our loving God is so much greater than those things that separate us.

After God created birds, fish and animals God created humans to be his agents and to act, as Archbishop Tutu reminds us, “compassionately and gently” toward all forms of life. The future of “this fragile earth, our island home,” is in our hands. As God’s family, we are stewards of God’s creation. We can be wantonly irresponsible, or we can be caring and compassionate. We can keep putting carbon into the air and heating up the planet, or we can take the measures necessary to reduce carbon and reduce climate change.

But this is really nothing new. Adlai Stevenson, years before the first Earth Day, talked about how we’re all passengers together on this little spaceship, “preserved from annihilation only by the care, the work, and, I will say, the love we give our fragile craft.” The unity of God’s creation, the unity into which we are all baptized – that’s what I want to emphasize this morning. In our closed system on Spaceship Earth, everything is connected to everything else. The unity of God’s creation, and its interconnectedness. As the poet Francis Thompson wrote, “Thou canst not stir a flower / Without troubling of a star.”

Caring for creation is at the very core of our Christian walk. Shortly we will all say the Baptismal Covenant – those being baptized who are old enough to answer for themselves; those infants whose parents and godparents will answer for them; and all of us as we renew our own baptismal covenant. “Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? – and “Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?” That certainly encompasses loving

the environment in which we all live and breathe and have our being. And our answer to those questions is "I will, with God's help." Meaning: "I commit my will, not just my fickle feelings but my will, to do it." Take action, do something, everybody can do something. Your Vestry here at St. Mary's recently did, by installing solar panels on the roof, which in addition to saving a ton of energy saves the church budget over \$10,000 a year.

There are still a few "Doubting Thomases" out there, to be sure, just as there are a few who think the earth is flat. But as yesterday's nationwide Marches for Science pointed out, (and there were about 500 of them around the globe), 99% of scientists say climate change is real and is a deadly serious problem. So take action, do something.

Let me end with a story. A bishop told of asking one of his clergy why he thought that God had called him to be a priest. The priest replied very eloquently that he had experienced the transforming love and power of Jesus Christ, and he wanted to give himself to Christ completely and share Christ's love with as many people as possible. The bishop told him that that was just great, but that he was describing the ministry of baptism, not of ordination.

There's really only one sacrament, baptism, out of which all the others flow. It's my baptism that gives me the right to an intimate, personal relationship with God, membership in the worldwide fellowship of Christian believers, and the power and presence of God's Holy Spirit in my life.

It's my baptism that gives me the right and the obligation to bear witness daily to the good news that God has come among us as one of us in the person of Jesus Christ, to bring back together that which we have separated. It's my baptism that gives me the power to minister in Christ's name to the lonely, the hungry, the sick and the anxious, to pray and work and give for the spread of Christ's kingdom. And it's my baptism that gives me the will to work unceasingly for the survival of the world we live in -- all living things, and the environment we all share. Creation care is at the very core of our Christian walk. Don't just sit there and bemoan the state of our world. Be willing to live out your baptismal covenant. Take action, do something.