

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS GREEN

A couple of nights ago Ann and I watched “The Bee Movie” on Netflix. It’s a cute story, for kids of all ages, about a hive of bees that lead a worldwide strike of bees and the resulting chaos as all the world’s flowers shrivel up and die. As we will see in the video right after this service, bees are a vital link in God’s interconnected creation, and we need to protect them for our own survival. As Job said, “In [God’s] hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being.”

July 12, a couple of weeks ago, was Henry David Thoreau’s 200th birthday. On April 23, 1851, Thoreau spoke in Concord, MA, about the interrelationship of God, man and nature. It was the opening salvo of the modern American conservation movement. Thoreau, whose famous book “Walden” would be published three years later, ended his talk with eight words that in coming decades helped save the Maine woods, Cape Cod, Yosemite and many other treasured American landscapes. These are Thoreau’s words: “In wildness is the preservation of the world.” (repeat)

Today we’re celebrating Creation Care Sunday. Today is also the 72nd anniversary of the dropping of the first atomic bomb in Hiroshima. In one of the cruel ironies of history, the dropping of that bomb with its blinding light happened on the Feast of the Transfiguration, when Peter, James and John saw Jesus on the mountaintop shining with a blinding light – “the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.”

You can make of that unfortunate coincidence whatever you want. Peter and James and John saw in Jesus’ dazzling light the glory of God in Jesus the Christ. We too can see the glory of God in God’s creation, as we seek to preserve it rather than abuse and destroy it. To quote our opening prayer: “Loving Creator, you are the spark of life behind the universe, from the infinite to the invisible. ...We come to open our eyes to your gifts, and in awe, we worship you.”

There shouldn’t be anything controversial about creation, God’s creation, should there? We’re in it, it’s all around us, we even are co-creators with God when we make a baby or paint a picture – plant a garden or compose a piece of music. As Dostoevsky put it:

“Love all God’s creation, both the whole and every grain of sand. ...If you love each thing you will perceive the mystery of God in all.”

And there shouldn’t be anything controversial about the fragility of creation either, and the potential dangers to it. That picture on the front of this morning’s bulletin, taken from outer space of Planet Earth, our island home -- that picture is an icon of how really small and beautiful our planet is, and how connected we inhabitants of earth are to everyone else on earth, to every living thing. Earth is our lifeboat in the vastness of outer space.

I want you to reflect with me for a moment about what it would mean to see the whole world as the body of God. Not just the bread we eat at communion as the Body of Christ, but the whole world as the Body of God.

Sallie McFague is a feminist Christian theologian now teaching in Vancouver. “Christianity is an incarnational religion;” she says. “It doesn’t just have to do with the spirit, it has to do with the earth, with the body.”

If we thought of the world more as God’s body, we’d probably begin to think of the world as sacred ground, much as the Native Americans do. Not as something to be used and misused but nurtured and protected just as we nurture and protect the human bodies we inhabit.

It’s easy to get discouraged in the face of the obstacles – an administration that certainly can’t be seen as looking favorably on the environment. Many of us were disappointed at our president’s decision to pull our country out of the Paris accord on climate change, but one of the good things to come out of that has been to galvanize many individuals and communities and congregations to think harder about what they can do for the planet. Our governor, Jerry Brown, has pledged to convene an international “climate summit” here in San Francisco next year with a view to bolstering the Paris agreement. We’re all in this together.

There’s always hope. Even the little bee, who from an aerodynamic standpoint can’t possibly fly, goes ahead and flies anyway. And plays a key part in the web of life.

So what can you and I do about loving the earth as God's body? We'll see one example in our "Summer in the City" program this morning. Fresh Energy is a Minnesota-based non-profit that is dedicated to promoting clean energy and working in the area of environmental advocacy. One of the projects they have developed is an ingenious project that combines bees and their vital pollination activity with solar energy.

Everyone can recycle and compost, everyone can promote and use alternative forms of energy. Everyone can try to use public transit more, turn off lights that aren't in use, walk to church. We can all try to leave only a small footprint on our mother, the earth, the body of God.

There is hope. There's always hope. I'm sure you've experienced a day like the one I remember a few years ago. Ann and I were in Mendocino. It was one of those perfect days -- clear blue skies, warm gentle breeze, the waves breaking against the rocky coast below us, the lighthouse up the coast blinking at us, pelicans flying past in formation. We ate our picnic lunch in bliss. It was an experience of transfiguration. Like those disciples of Jesus on the mountaintop, I wanted to build a booth and stay there forever.

That's the way it can be, that's the way God created it – the Kingdom of God that we pray will come is green, just as the Kingdom of God that we pray will come is justice and peace. It's up to each one of us to work toward that kingdom. Do we just throw out that piece of cantaloupe, that aluminum can – I remember Peggy da Silva asking, when we throw something away, where is "away"? Think about it. Or do we carefully sort out and compost, recycle, consume less. Write or call your elected representatives, encourage alternative power, be responsible stewards of God's creation. God maybe won't do anything for us, but God will do something through us.

Let me close with these words from poet Mary Oliver:

"Do you think there is anything not attached by its unbreakable cord to everything else? Plant your peas and corn in the field when the moon is full, or risk failure. This has been understood since planting began. ...

"Teach the children. We don't matter so much, but the children do. Show them daisies and the pale hepatica. Teach them the taste of sassafras and wintergreen. The

lives of the blue sailors, mallow, sunbursts, the moccasin flowers. And the frisky ones -- inkberry, lamb's quarters, blueberries. And the aromatic ones -- rosemary, oregano.. Give them peppermint to put in their pockets as they go to school. Give them the fields and the woods and the possibility of the world salvaged from the lords of profit. Stand them in the stream, head them upstream, rejoice as they learn to love this green space they live in, its sticks and leaves and then the silent, beautiful blossoms.

“Attention is the beginning of devotion.”

Pay attention.