

ONE PERSON CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Every Wednesday at 12:10 we have a mid-week Eucharist here in the Chapel. And every week we hear someone speak about a different saint of the church. Everyone from Sts. Peter and Paul to Florence Nightingale and Martin Luther King Jr. It's fun – you should come – many of us bring a sandwich and stay for lunch upstairs.

Today is Earth Day. There's a saint I'd like to celebrate today, someone who likely will never be called a saint by the church. A prophet maybe. But nevertheless, someone who in my eyes is a saint -- one of the great heroes of the environmental movement -- Rachel Carson. While not an active member of a church, she was certainly doing God's work, working for the benefit of all of God's creation. On this Good Shepherd Sunday we can say with certainty that Rachel Carson was a good shepherd of the earth.

Rachel Carson was born in 1907 in the little town of Springdale, Pennsylvania, not far from Pittsburgh. After college and graduate school, she became a marine scientist working for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. She was always aware of the impact that humans had on the natural world. She wrote three books about the sea, all best sellers, and all three were physical explanations of life, drenched with the miracle of what happens to life in and near the sea. Even as far back as the 1950s, Carson's ecological vision led to discussions on climate change, rising sea levels, melting Arctic glaciers, collapsing bird and animal populations.

But – it was the evidence of widespread misuse of chemical pesticides after World War II that prompted Carson reluctantly to speak out again -- not just about the immediate threat to humans and non-humans from chemical exposure, but also to question the assumption by many that human domination of nature was OK . She was one of the first to say that stewardship of God's creation meant living in harmony with nature, rather than trying to dominate it.

In 1962, Rachel Carson wrote the book *Silent Spring*, which really began to open people's eyes to what we humans were doing to creation. I've been re-reading the book,

and it's fascinating – beautifully written, and full of solid scientific data about the chemicals and other pollutants we're releasing into the environment.

By the way, did you see the article in the paper the other day about the disastrous effects of Roundup? Rachel Carson, where are you now that we need you?

A recent article in *The New Yorker* magazine about Carson points out that *Silent Spring* not only launched the environmental movement, but provoked the passage of the Clean Air Act in 1963, the Wilderness Act in 1964, the National Environmental Policy Act in 1969, the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act, both in 1972, and led to the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970. Also the first Earth Day in 1970. As *The New Yorker* article puts it, “the number of books that have done as much good in the world can be counted on the arms of a starfish.” One person can make a difference!

Just one example – a few years ago the use of DDT was getting into the environment and destroying the eggshells of the pelicans, until pelicans became almost extinct. I remember how concerned people around San Francisco Bay were about the disappearance of the pelicans. Today, thanks largely to Rachel Carson, DDT is banned, and I'm happy to report that from our apartment along the Sausalito waterfront we see hundreds of very healthy-looking pelicans flying by. May that be a sign of encouragement to those who struggle against the extinction of species and the ruination of our environment – one person can do something – one person can make a difference.

Unfortunately right now there's a move to roll back many of the environmental gains of the past 50 years. To me this is terribly short-sighted. “For God so loves the world” – the whole world, and everything in it We have all sinned in our failure to preserve this earth, our fragile island home, floating in the vast blackness of outer space. Unfortunately there isn't a spare earth we can fall back on. Each one of us can make a difference, must make a difference, so we can hand over this earth in pristine condition to our children and grandchildren. As environmentalist David Brower put it, “We don't inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.” Just look at those little hands holding the earth on the cover of our bulletin this morning. I'm all in

agreement with Bishop Marc, who, speaking of the Paris Climate Agreement, says, “We’re still in.” It’s our calling, our duty as humans created in the image of God, to care for God’s creation – the world – all of it.

In *Silent Spring* Carson asked the hard questions about whether humans had the right to try and control nature, to destroy non-human life. Everything is connected to everything else, she showed. “We poison the caddis flies in a stream and the salmon runs dwindle and die.”

Not surprisingly, Carson was vilified by the chemical companies, and she finally succumbed to cancer on April 14, 1964, at the young age of 56. And by the way, she had planned for her next book to be about the rising seas.

One person can make a difference. Today thanks to Rachel Carson our eyes are more open to the wonders and the fragility of God’s creation.

What about us? Can we make a difference?

Remember the movie “The Graduate”? It was in 1967. Dustin Hoffman had just graduated from college and was home with his parents, trying to avoid the question all his parents’ friends were asking: “What are you going to do now?” One man told him, confidentially: “Plastics.” That was the key for his future success – plastics.

And what’s happened? We’re drowning in plastics. There’s a patch of plastic waste the size of Texas floating out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Fish are ingesting it, because plastic doesn’t decompose, it breaks down into tiny little pieces that fish like to eat. And then when we eat the fish we eat the plastic.

The Bishop of Salisbury, in England, has recently spoken in favor of banning a number of single-use plastic products. We consume single-use plastic every day – shopping bags, food packaging, drinking straws, beverage containers, dry cleaning covers, bubble wrap, etc, etc, etc – and for the most part we discard them immediately. What happens to them? When you throw something away, where is ‘away’?

A lot of the plastic ends up in the Bay or the ocean, or blowing around a land fill. Each one of us can do something to minimize our use of single-use plastic. Think about

your own use of plastic and do something about it. Be part of the solution, not the problem. Be aware that our actions today have consequences for our future and the future of our children and grandchildren. Be a good shepherd of the planet.

But you know, as overwhelming as the problems seem sometimes, we can embrace hope. As Christians, we are people with hope, because God has shown us at Easter that God can bring life out of death, victory out of defeat, hope out of discouragement. God's creation has amazing powers of self-correction, with our help. Just look at the figures for next fall's predicted salmon run—the largest in 65 years! We can all have hope, we can all do something.

Start by doing one thing. Ann just ordered some reusable bee's wrap to use instead of plastic wrap or aluminum foil to store food, over and over again. It's initially more expensive, but it's reusable, washable and compostable. Bee's wrap.

In many ways, our parents rose to such a challenge in World War II – when an entire generation mobilized to preserve a way of life. That's why they were called the “Greatest Generation.” Our kids and grandkids will only call us the Greatest Generation if we rise to our challenge and become the Greenest Generation.

Because when I look at our grandkids, I wonder what the next decades hold for them. When they're older, will they look at me and ask, “Grampa, why didn't your generation do anything before it was too late?” How will I answer them? How will you answer your grandkids?

There's a saying from the Talmud that goes like this: *Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work. But neither are you free to abandon it.*