



Sermons

from Northwood United Church

“A Prayer for the Community of Earth.”

Psalm 19, Luke 24:36(b)-48

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May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

So how is your body this morning? I know that mine, though not too overworked yesterday at the Earth Day work bee, is feeling some effects of the hours spent on the roof trying to convince moss that there might be a better place to take up shop. But it was a great way to spend some of the weekend in which many in our culture take moments to pay loving attention to something we take for granted so often. The Earth is full of the glory of God, and on this particular part, also full of cones from the trees and dandelions, and has a tendency to want to go wild.

And it was good to see so many people caring for this little part of the earth that we have been given in common to care for. It is an amazing gift we have here, and working to care for it only makes the gift seem more precious.

It is also great to feel the earth opening up for another year eh? A few weeks ago we had a sunny day not unlike yesterday only a little earlier in the season and I was sitting on my back deck. It was quiet but I could hear a pine tree in my back yard and it was ticking and crackling. I didn't know pine trees made this noise, but in spring, on a hot day, the sap starts to move and the cones start to open and I could hear it. It was amazing- feeling the creation literally opening up after winter, opening up to a new season.

Think about your relationship with the earth. Do you have a feelings and memories connected with the earth? What experiences have shaped your relationship with the soil under your feet? Did you grow up on a farm? In the city? Did you get outside? Have you ever worked the land? Hiked the mountains, travelled the waters? Do you feel connected with the earth or somehow separate from it?

I had always felt somehow connected to the earth, even if it was only to dig gardens and pull weeds for a little spending money as a young teen. But I had an experience that shaped the way I feel about the earth. When I was in northern Alberta on my student internship, I went with a congregation member out for a day in the gas fields north of Manning. He was a mechanic and maintained heavy machinery. I had asked him if I could go out one day and see what people did in the field. So this day we went out, drove for a couple of hours into the wilderness and came to a plant which receives the gas from the holes drilled through the earth's crust all around in and piped in. It is like a bicycle wheel with a hub and spokes that go out kilometers to holes and we went out to one of these holes.

Well it was interesting to see how the whole thing worked until we got out of the truck at one of these holes in a clearing about the size of a football field. Nobody out there but us, and as soon as I opened the door, the smell hit me. A sour smell nothing like anything I had ever smelled before. And there was an unfinished rigging over top of one of several holes drilled into the earth, each of which was oozing a thick grey smelly sludge, which they were attempting to gather into a huge holding pond they had created. We walked out into the middle of this clearing and honestly, it felt like I was standing in the middle of an oozing open soar in the earth. It made a lasting impression. I felt like we were causing the earth pain in this place, and doing damage the consequences of which we actually couldn't calculate. And I somehow felt closer to the earth

for the experience, in the same way that you feel closer to someone after you have gone through an illness or loss with them and felt their pain and suffering. There is a kind of intimacy that grows.

This was the intimacy shared by the disciples after the crucifixion and in those early days when rumors were travelling around that Jesus had been raised by God from the dead. And they gathered in small clusters sharing their pain and bewilderment. In that moment, he appeared with them, and they were afraid and confused. And I don't know all the details of their experience from this historical distance but clearly, an intimacy grew among them and with him, a real lived bond that was strong, and life changing. In those early Easter days, pain and suffering was transformed. A powerful resurrecting spirit came to life in and among them. In God, their lost and pain was more than loss and pain- it became the power of the resurrection alive among them. They went from being victims to being witnesses.

I was reading an earth day message that Bruce Sanguin, author of Darwin Divinity and the Dance of the Cosmos wrote. And he asks an interesting question: "Can resurrection come to Earth as the resurrected Christ did to the disciples in that room so long ago?" It is a good question because I worry about what is happening to the earth and the toll human activity is placing on this amazing wonderful organism that sustains our life and the life of the community of earth. Global warming is real, there is an island of plastic known as the Pacific Trash Vortex that is made of plastic bottles and bags and debris that is the size of the state of Texas floating in the Pacific Ocean, and as that plastic breaks down it is distributing tiny particles of plastic into the marine ecosystem. For marine life it is like having a massive cloud of plastic hanging over your head and dusting your world. Can resurrection come to this and so many other situations in which the community of earth finds itself today?

Well, I believe it can but like that first resurrection, we need to be aware of the crucifixion. You see those disciples experienced resurrection out of an intimate awareness of loss. They were huddled together sharing in the intimate common experience of what had happened to Jesus and to them. They knew they had lost the most hopeful powerful life giving force in their life. The good news of the gospel is not that we can now escape the painful and sometimes devastating realities of life but rather that these realities can be transformed. The crucified one comes to us and says, "peace be with you. I know you. This present devastation is not the last word in this story. New life is possible even here." Resurrected life rises up within the context of an intimate connection with suffering and loss. The butterfly emerges from the empty shell of the dead caterpillar.

Biologist Elizabet Sahtouris encourages us to think of the butterfly as a sign of hope for our age- a sign of the resurrection if you will. Within each chrysalis a miracle occurs. Tiny cells that biologists actually call "imaginal cells" begin to appear. They are wholly different from caterpillar cells and carry different information, vibrating to a different frequency if you like. At first, the caterpillar's immune system perceives these new cells as enemies, and attacks them, just as new ideas in science, medicine, politics, and religion may be attacked by mainstream thinkers. But the new cells are not deterred. They continue to appear in even greater numbers, recognizing one another and bonding together to form clumps. With enough clumps, the caterpillar's immune system is overwhelmed. The caterpillar body gives way to the growth of the butterfly. When the time is right the butterfly flies off to embrace its new world.

My prayer for the community of earth on this day is that imaginal cells of humans will appear, not unlike the imaginal cells of early followers of Jesus, humming to a different frequency, singing a new song, and intimately connected. My prayer is that these cells would grow and not be deterred. The common thread within these imaginal cells of people is the intimate knowledge of their shared a life, one earthly life. My prayer is that you and I might participate in such a transformation in the community of earth.