

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us today, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen

I was standing in the water at Sandwell the other night, reflecting on the vastness of the water, the energy of the water, and the volume of water that stood before me. The power that water holds is enormous . . . power to give and sustain life, and the power to take it away. The wind and atmosphere have the same power of giving and taking life . . . fire has this power . . . and in creation as a whole, held in the delicate balance of a symbiotic system, is the ability to not only sustain life, but support the cycle of life, death and new life.

The way of this symbiotic system is response over time to changes small and large to the way things have been. Creation knows no other way than to respond to what is happening in the environment. How must things change when a bird makes a nest in a tree for a season? Or when a predator moves in? Or when a month's worth of rain falls in a day? When forest fires rage, they cause everything living to flee for their lives or pray their defenses are strong enough to protect them. Fires leave scorched earth, scorched homes, and ash hanging in the air. The smoke rides on the wind hundreds, thousands of miles; it fills the air, turning the sun orange, reminding us that we are not separate from the devastation. But fires too are part of creation, and part of that symbiotic system that sustains life – there are seeds of trees that need fire in order to break through their shell or to activate germination. Creation's way is the cycle of life, death and new life – there is always a response to death, which is some manifestation of new life.

In our text this morning, God manifests God's self in a pillar of fire, leading Moses and the Hebrew people out of Egypt to a place called the Sea of Reeds. God tells Moses to stretch his hand out over the waters. It is often depicted that the waters part immediately . . . but reading closely, we find it actually takes all night. An east wind comes over the waters and turns the sea into dry land . . . it divides water from land.

The language intends to remind us of when God did this in the beginning of creation. It's not a gentle separating – the Hebrew word is more violent, like splitting wood with an axe.<sup>1</sup>

The wind comes from the east, the direction of sunrise, the direction associated with springtime and beginnings, dividing the water from the land. The water responds to Ruah – wind, breath, spirit. These images are supposed to feel dramatic, infused with the supernatural power of God.

With the Egyptians still in pursuit, Moses leads the Hebrew people on dry land through the waters, like a birth canal, from certain death, through to new life. Just as the water gives life to the Hebrew people, it also takes it; when safely on the other side, Moses is instructed to reach his hand over the waters yet again and bring the water down on their oppressors.

Here on the island, where life is still a bit wild, maybe not as wild as Exodus, we have constant reminders of the power of creation to give and take away. Many of us rely on water from under the ground; we burn dead trees for warmth and live in relationship with the plants and animals that also make a home here. We are at the mercy of the wind that blows down trees and stirs up waves, and we live with the possibility of a local forest fire. It's good to be awake to Creation's power, to allow that knowledge to shape the way we choose to live; it is good to live with respect in Creation.

With Creation as a whole truly out of balance these days, it seems we are seeing Creation do as much taking as giving. We are seeing more destruction of habitat and more death around the world . . . and at the same time as we have a productive growing season in our gardens and many species of healthy wildlife around us. Not all parts of the system are required to adjust in the same way or at the same rate to environmental changes.

Even as these changes move in, Creation is ever our teacher . . . as she has been the teacher of generations before us since time immemorial. Those who observe and learn from her, who relate to her with reverence, who are able to respond, like her, to changes in the environment, have the best chance of sustaining life. We live in this quickly changing world because enough of our ancestors forgot about the

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<sup>1</sup> Altar, Robert. The Hebrew Bible: The Five Books of Moses, 271.

importance of this relationship to put these huge changes in motion. But because we still belong to Creation, she is still our teacher and we are invited to renew and deepen relationship with her and with God, who is manifest in her.

In this passage from Exodus, we learn about the human relationship with God and Creation. The Hebrew people don't escape without God's help, for God is manifest in the wind that divides the waters and in the pillar of fire that leads and protects them . . . but God also doesn't do these things alone, rather in relationship with Moses and the people. It is in these relationships with God and Creation that the Hebrew people find the gateway to life.