

Sermon – 2nd Sunday of Easter
St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Beaverton, Oregon
Katherine Brick
Sunday, May 1, 2011

Job 38:1-11, 25-27, 31-33; 39:26-27; 40:3-5

Psalm 148

Revelation 22:1-5, 16-17

Beloved people, created *within all* of God's creation, grace and peace to you from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

On this Creation Sunday, let's take a moment right now to look out these windows. What do you see? How many different God-created ones? How many different colors and textures? Notice shapes, sizes, variety. How might it be that this land, these plants, these animals, the water and other creations are praising God with us right now? How many Sundays and other days have they raised their praises right along with us with not a bit of awareness on our part? How many times have they raised their praises without us?

In this morning's Psalm we hear that we are far from alone in praising God. Angels and hosts, sun and moon, shining stars, highest heavens and waters above the heavens . . . all these praise God. Each Christmas we have cause to remember that the heavenly angels sing, but truly, have you considered just how it is that the sun, moon, and stars praise God?

But there's more. The psalmist continues the list of those praising God . . . ocean depths, storms, mountains, plants, all animals of every kind including humans. And wonder of wonders, for some reason the Creator desires and receives the praise of each with joy and enthusiasm. What do you see in your mind's eye as you summon an image of each of these praising the Creator?

One image came my way last Sunday. After Pastor Eagan had preached about earth's shuddering response to Jesus' death, Calvary's choir sang an anthem based on Mary going to the empty tomb:

Was it a morning like this?
Did the grass sing,
did the earth rejoice to feel You again?
Over and over like a trumpet underground,
did the earth seem to pound, "He is risen!"
Over and over in a never ending round,
"He is risen, Hallelujah!"

New eyes. That is a vital piece of what will carry us along on the journey to heal creation. I need not recite the many wounds we humans have inflicted on the earth, some unintentionally, some obviously, and some knowingly and without remorse. I am going to focus on what we can see in scripture with new eyes that can inform and enliven a way forward for us as people of faith. The Holy Spirit stirs faithful believers of every generation to find God's will and message in the Living Word.

David Rhoads is a professor of the New Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. He has written a number of articles regarding earthkeeping, several of which are part of the materials Pastor Hartwig with the Care of Creation Team are using as we conduct workshops. He writes that there are three mistakes we have commonly made as we have read about creation in the Bible.

First, our reading has been human-centered, as if God is concerned only with us and designed the rest of creation for our personal use. But God called all creation good even before creating humans. And humans were created to tend and preserve the earth. We have had the idea that

humans were the pinnacle of creation. My professor of the Earthkeeping class at George Fox maintains not humans but Sabbath is the pinnacle of creation. We are *among* the creatures, *within* creation, not *against* or *over* all creation.

Rhoads' second point is that we have inappropriately read "to have dominion" as authority to dominate and exploit nature for human use. Recent scholars tell us dominion is "to take responsibility for" creation. Ellen F. Davis reminds us that since appreciation and enjoyment of the creatures are the hallmark of God's dominion, so should it be with us who are made in God's image. I for one would much rather have the task of appreciating and enjoying fellow creatures than figuring out how to dominate them.

In today's first lesson from Job, it took 40 chapters to get to the point where Job finally gets it . . . that it isn't all about him all the time . . . an all too human point of view. In chapter 38 God reminds Job who did and who did not create the earth, hold back the sea, fix the stars in their courses, create hawks and eagles. In chapters 39 and 40 God uplifts wild creatures . . . lion, raven, onager, wild goat, and ostrich in ways that lift up their dignity. The point, as William Brown writes is that "Job's contact with the margins of creation grant him a new level of dignity, one that arises from within nature, not against it. Nature is a worthy partner and instructor for humankind." Finally, Job answers, "Behold, I am of small account." Along with Job, we can have **new eyes** to see more clearly what scripture has to say to us about our place *within* creation, not against, above, or in domination over.

Now, to Rhoads' third point. We have read scripture incorrectly to say humans are only pilgrims on the Earth and our real home is in heaven. Earth is a place we are passing through, and we don't need to take care

of it. Reading with **new eyes**, we see that the Kingdom is breaking into this world. Especially in this Easter season, we remember that Jesus died to reconcile all things in heaven and on Earth. Jesus said at the end of time he would return to earth. And in today's reading from Revelation we see this end of time vision of heaven on earth, with a crystal clear river of life-giving water flowing through the middle of the street, and with trees of life yielding leaves that heal the nations. In no way is this a throw-away world. What we do matters.

And speaking of what we do, I want to take a moment to celebrate St. Andrew's long history and current work of earthkeeping. In last Sunday's Weekly News there was a whole page from the Green Team about earthkeeping efforts here. The Community Garden has been in place for some years, and this year will have a Sabbath due to the construction. Many of you have already experienced the wetlands in several ways including tending it and worshiping there, and the call is now out for everyone to touch the earth to remove invasive species over the next four Saturdays. In the fall, native plants will nestle their roots into this soil as St. Andrew's Rockwell Collins Green Communities Grant is implemented. When all these fellow creations have been planted, the congregation will bless them and invite them to praise God with us throughout their lives. These are some ways the congregation together is living out care and community and praise with creation.

It is often said that we will not care for that which we do not love. To grow to love anything requires spending time, learning to know the beloved through sensory contact. It is important for us individually to find ways to experience nature through all our senses. There are too many days I slide into my car, drive to the seminary, walk across cement, study and learn through the day, and reverse that pathway going home. One night after many hours of reading and writing about

earthkeeping issues, I took to heart that advice of spending some time with creation. Just before bed, I flung a shawl around my shoulders and stepped outside. I was beckoned by stars in a sky that had dismally and persistently darkened and drizzled all day. At 1:00 a.m. the world seemed still. I felt moist air on my face, the slow creep of coolness through my shawl. I smelled the rich, real earth as my body relaxed and grounded itself and inhaled deep, easy breaths. I heard the trickles of creeklet water and the first lone frog of the season daring from time to time to sing his solo. I saw a pair of ghostshadow ducks silently navigate the creeklet, cross the pond through shadows of trees, and then lose their shapes in the gathering and rising mist that haloed the night lights. This spaciousness in form, time, and soul, this deeper connection with creation, these brief moments brought a deeper love and appreciation and awareness of this earth that quickens my spirit to keep it. Even in my silence, I felt a kindred praising of God. I want to seek such times more often, and I so urge you to do the same, to find times and spaces to connect with creation.

May the Holy Spirit continue to give us new eyes. May we each see our place in creation afresh. May we more fully see and live into our keeping and preserving of all creation. May we often find moments, when with senses and souls wide open we see and join the chorus of praise with all creation.