

Reflection: September 13, 2020

Genesis 3:14-19, 4:8-16; Psalm 139: 7-14; Romans 5:12-17

I begin with a quote from Pope Francis:

“This is the season for letting our prayer be inspired anew by closeness to nature...to reflect on our lifestyles...for undertaking prophetic actions...directing the planet towards life, not death.”

During September, the church is invited to diverge from the regular lectionary into a time which is called Creation Time – It is a time which calls us to give thanks for and celebrate with creation ... and to recognize how everything in creation serves and sustains life. But it is also a time in which we need to acknowledge the growing concern about the ecological crisis and the way Earth has been treated.

For the past number of decades, we have been made aware of the rapid extinction of beautiful and unique creatures. Thanks to the honest and disciplined work of climate scientists, we know that our lifestyle is unsustainable, that we are in climate crisis. In our consumeristic desire to have and to enjoy, rather than to be and to grow; in our mantra of ‘profit at all costs’; we have consumed the resources of the earth in

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excessive and destructive ways. We have not been faithful stewards of the life that God, from the very beginning, called good.

Today, we reflect on our relationship with the land. In the story from Genesis 3, Adam and Eve find that their confused actions over the tree of the knowledge of good and evil have transformed their relationship with the very earth they walk. The land no longer brings forth food to Adam easily. “You will have to struggle to grow enough food”, God tells him. “The ground will produce thorns and thistles and you will have to sweat to earn a living.”

And then, one chapter later, Adam and Eve’s son Cain kills his brother Abel. Here, the land comes forth as a witness, crying to God of Abel’s blood in the ground. Just as the first humans have a relationship with God and the other creatures, they also have a relationship with the earth, their Mother. Adam’s very name means ‘earth creature’ in Hebrew. And so, the first humans learn something we know well today, in this era of climate change – the land is affected by what we do. It responds to what we do.

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But then, when we read the verses from Psalm 139, we gain another perspective with regards to our relationship with the land. When we read of being knit in our mother's womb, we recognize that Earth is a kind of womb – and more than that, a full-fledged mother of the world as a whole. Just as the mythical first humans came from the earth, so too are we created by God as earth-beings. And the question, “Where can I go from your presence?” is a reflection on our grounding in the land ... as creatures of the land God created.

The land surely feels and witnesses what we do, in waste dumps and on fields of war, in the forests that we cut down and the wetlands that we drain.

And yet, when we come to the reading from Paul's letter to the Romans, and his lengthy and confusing speech on grace, we are reminded of Jesus' central role in delivering mercy, love, and healing, despite the pain caused by our sinful ways.

Could it be, that the land holds the memory of our transgressions but also offers the grace of forgiveness for the pain we heap upon it?

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Is it too late for us to repent of our Earth-damaging ways, and to turn our lives around so as to allow Earth to be renewed?

How can we better respect the holiness of the land? What would a truly just and repaired relationship with the land look like today? What can we learn from traditional Aboriginal teachings about commitment to right relation with the land and all that God has created?

Can we, with the Elders of First Nations come to a renewed “understanding of creation and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that is deep, and rich and to be treasured?”

Care for the earth is not just some Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We have a moral and ethical obligation, as the church, and as citizens of this planet, to protect people and the Earth, living our faith in loving relationship with all of God's creation.

This planet is our one and only home. We have no other choice – we must care for it. And yet, it seems we are living on this planet as if we had another one

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to go to. Remember ... the Earth does not belong to us; we belong to the Earth.

To conclude, I share with you the words of a prayer for the Season of Creation ... and I invite you to look at the images as you listen to the words.

Creator of Life, at your word, the Earth brought forth plants yielding seed and trees of every kind bearing fruit.

The rivers, mountains, minerals, seas and forests sustained life.

The eyes of all looked to you to satisfy the needs of every living thing. And throughout time the Earth has sustained life.

Through the planetary cycles of days and seasons, renewal and growth,
you open your hand to give creatures our food in the proper time.

In your wisdom, you granted a Sabbath; a blessed time to rest in gratitude for all that you have given; a time to liberate ourselves from vicious consumption;

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a time to allow the land and all creatures to rest from the burden of production.

But these days our living pushes the planet beyond its limits. Our demands for growth, and our never-ending cycle of production and consumption are exhausting our world.

The forests are leached, the topsoil erodes, the fields fail, the deserts advance,
the seas acidify, the storms intensify.

We have not allowed the land to observe her Sabbath, and the Earth is struggling to be renewed.

During this Season of Creation, we ask you to grant us courage to observe a Sabbath for our planet.

Strengthen us with the faith to trust in your providence.

Inspire us with the creativity to share what we have been given. Teach us to be satisfied with enough.

And as we proclaim a Jubilee for the Earth, send your Holy Spirit to renew the face of creation.

In the name of the One who came to proclaim good news to all creation. Jesus Christ. Amen.