

A Wonderful Message

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

April 28, 2019

Scriptures: Isaiah 65:17-25 and John 20:1-18

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Our most recent statement of our collective faith as a United Church of Canada, A Song of Faith, reminds us that to be an environmentalist as a person of faith is profoundly theological – that is, it is all centred-on God. Listen to this beautiful poem of our Church, a modern-day version of a Psalm of praise:

Finding ourselves in a world of beauty and mystery,
of living things, diverse and interdependent,
of complex patterns of growth and evolution,
of subatomic particles and cosmic swirls,
we sing of God the Creator, the Maker and Source of all that is.

Each part of creation reveals unique aspects of God the Creator,
who is both in creation and beyond it.

All parts of creation, animate and inanimate, are related.

All creation is good.

We sing of the Creator,
who made humans to live and move
and have their being in God.¹

“And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’”

The writer of these strange, apocalyptic visions of the Book of Revelations, John of Patmos, he was exiled during a time of severe persecution. In *Revelations*, he urges the faithful to remain steadfast, and, despite all appearances to the contrary, he assures them that the Roman Empire's power is not absolute; it is God who reigns supreme.

Theologian Ginger Grab, points out that this writing elevates us out of our human reality to be able to see things the way God sees them.²

On this Sunday after Earth Day, we marvel at God's Creation, and Scriptures have been chosen which mark the *beginning* – The 1st chapter of the Gospel of John – and also a vision of *God's ending* in the Book of Revelation.

When things are in disarray, as it seems our world is right now, don't we desperately need a perspective that jolts us out of a collective sense of resignation?

In 1969 there was a major oil spill in Santa Barbara, California. A visionary American Senator, Gaylord Nelson, wanted to engage people about this environmental disaster. He thought, “Maybe we should start with students.”

So, in 1970 he chose April 22nd which fell between spring break and final exams, as a “national teach-in on the environment”. That day over 20 million Americans took to the streets, Campuses, parks and other spaces to demonstrate their support of a vision for a healthy, sustainable environment.

¹ A Song of Faith: A Statement of Faith of The United Church of Canada/L'Église Unie du Canada © 2006

² Ginger Grab, “Homiletical Perspective”. *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary – Year B, Volume 4*

By the end of that year, the United States Environmental Protection Agency had been created and the Clean Air, Clean Water, and Endangered Species Acts had all passed. Two decades later, in 1990, Earth Day went global, mobilizing 200 million people in 141 countries and lifting environmental issues onto the world stage.³

Prophets with vision are not just confined to the Bible, remember. Sometimes we need jarring visions to shake us up a little; to transform our lifestyles that unconsciously seek comfort, rather than a pattern of living that cares for Creation.

Our Biblical faith coaxes us out of our comfort zones. Secular environmentalism has challenged Christian theology to imagine how our lives & world look from God's perspective. The vision on the screen, the Peaceable Kin-dom, based on Isaiah 65, an apocalyptic vision similar to Revelation. It is an absurd reality of peace, equally absurd might be a vision of a clean earth given when we and our leaders are doing to Creation.

But! Profoundly limited political visions of our world **will** fall away. Donald Trump's narcissism is not at all a new. We have had tyrants and self-serving leaders throughout history.

But history shows that revolutions ultimately topple tyranny, God's kin-dom too always emerges, and ultimately topples the proud and mighty... in God's time. In spite of the destruction we have wrought on God's Creation, there **are** signs superheroes for Creation are all around us.

I want to finish with a famous reflection by astronomer Carl Sagan called "Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space":

Look...at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us.

On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives.

The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader," every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there-on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.

The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner, how frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that, in glory and triumph, they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot.

It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known."⁴

³ Taken from <https://earthday.ca/>

⁴ Carl Sagan & Ann Druyan. *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space*. Random House 1994.