

April 6, 2008  
Isaiah 24:1, 4-11  
Mark 16:9-15

Good News to the Whole Creation

At the time, Creation Sunday seemed like a good idea. My plan was to have a nice day to celebrate God's world. Everyone happy and smiling, outside appreciating the air and water and trees. Blessing the dogs and cats and bunnies and snakes and ferrets and birds and bugs and all living things that might show up. One big event to make us feel good and Earth Day would be appropriately acknowledged for the year. (dust off the hands) Thank you very much. But the more I looked around for ideas, the more I read, the more it seemed like we needed more than just one Sunday. I mean, we're talking God's creation. The whole creation that God made and brought into being from nothing. All the amazing complex life. And one day for that isn't enough. Not to practice recycling and conservation or build birdhouses and compost piles. One day for creation isn't enough. We've just taken a day before. And now our rivers are polluted. Our oceans are full of plastic bags. More people than ever have asthma because of air toxins. Cancer is at an all time high. 90% of the earth's fisheries are depleted. 95% of the earth's forests

are gone. Because we just want to take one day. As Isaiah says, the world is polluted. The covenant between us and God is broken. Around the world, creation is dying. People live without clean water. Habitats for God's creatures are destroyed and we want to care for one day. We, who believe that all life is from God. It's time to kick the one day habit. Now there are plenty of reasons that caring for creation doesn't get much press in the church. It's looks too political. Get into it too much and it gets touchy for the businessfolks and farmers and manufacturers and all of us just trying to get by. Mention the word environment in any of the churches where I grew up and people's backs would stiffen and their foreheads would crease. Everyone knew it was a hoax. Some of them even knew it was a politically correct, sob story made up by atheist hippies. The ones with long hair who practiced free love and didn't wear deodorant. Who let all their incense and pot just smoke reality right out of their brains. "Well," those church folks would say, "I'm sure as heck not gonna support any of that, I'll tell you right now. Those lazy folks just don't want to work like God tells us to." So the church there and

everywhere moved on. There were bigger fish to fry, souls to save, theological hairs to split. God's creation could fend for itself.

But the rest of the world is noticing that's not enough. More people are seeing it's not enough. There's more organic, eco-friendly, environmentally safe stuff than ever before. People are buzzing more about 'green' products, green appliances, green collar jobs. The earth is starting to matter more to people. But to the church? Schools and community groups and scout troops and senior citizen homes, they are working on gardens and putting up rain barrels and using solar panels. And the church? People are going to farmers markets and swap meets and stream cleanups. And they are warning us to change for health reasons and moral reasons and financial reasons. And the church? We have the best reasons. We have spiritual reasons. Divine, new life, resurrection reasons for caring for creation. And not just for one day, but every day. The US Catholic bishops wrote, 'Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in a relationship with all of God's creation.' If anyone should care about creation every day, it

should be people who know there is a Creator. This is a matter of what we believe, of our faith. A matter of the good news that is for the whole creation.

Today's gospel lesson from Mark, I think, makes that clear. It's a story after the resurrection about a little gathering of disciples. Last week we learned that some called it the first church. It's just days after the crucifixion. The disciples are worn out, tired, sad. They miss Jesus and what he said and did. They miss the good news he proclaimed. So they withdrew from the world, sad and hurt. Might and cruelty and death had won the day. Their little crusade to give sight to the blind and release the captives and heal the world had failed. There was nothing they could do to stop the powerful and their empires. Their mission to be faithful to God was for nothing. But Mary Magdalene arrives at their hiding place to tell them the good news; Jesus has risen. But what does she know about anything? Then two men who had been walking in the countryside meet Jesus and they report back; Jesus has risen. But it's not possible. There's no way. One little life can't overcome the power-hungry kill-or-be-killed forces of the world. People may say something is happening,

they may believe. But the first church, they will not believe. They will not accept it. Nothing can change like that.

The denial. Disbelief. We've been there. We have refused to believe that there is anything that will help with climate change and pollution and the thousands of endangered species. We have just gone with the flow and acted with the powerful as if this isn't God's creation first. I do it myself. I'll say to myself, "My life doesn't do anything bad to the earth. What do they know? I recycle and reuse my water bottles and I save the napkins I get at the drive thru. But in the end, you know it doesn't matter because there are still people dumping things in streams and skinning baby seals alive and making sure we stay addicted to oil. There's nothing we can do. It's just not possible. So we'll leave it alone and huddle up with the disciples and get a little irritated with all the people disrupting us with resurrection stories, asking us to believe.

But the thing about it is that God believes. God, our Creator believes in life. From the biggest rainforest to the driest desert. From the rarest orchid to the most common sparrow. God our creator loves creating life. All kinds of it. And in Jesus, God says yes to creation and being and new

life. Just like God did in the beginning. Jesus comes into that walled-up closed off gathering of disciples. He comes to that church and he upbraids them. I am risen! People told you the good news that I am alive. Why didn't you believe? You knew my message. You knew my words. You knew the scriptures. Why didn't you believe? I am risen. So get up. You can't stay here. Get up and go into all the world and proclaim the good news about life to the whole creation.

The whole creation. Jesus says the good news is for the whole creation. Not just for the disciples or the church or the hippies in the communes. But for every living thing. The resurrection, the new life of God is for all of creation. That's our mission from Jesus himself.

I've been reading a book by Dr. J Matthew Sleeth called "Serve God, Save the Planet." And I think every person who claims to follow Christ should read it. He writes that loving God means loving what God loves. It means caring for creation. It means proclaiming hope. It means proclaiming the good news that the earth and all that is in it is the Lord's. We live our belief that it's more than just something we

consume. St. John of Damascus put it this way, “The whole earth is a living icon of the face of God.”

Dr. Sleeth’s book has really made me think. It’s made me think about all those things that we’ve been happy to tell ourselves. What the church has been happy to tell itself. We excuse ourselves by saying we worship God, not the earth. All those enviro-whatever people are all new agey weirdos who use crystals. They believe in earth mothers and fairies and give spiritual power to mountains. And that’s a big no-no for us.

Especially in the Calvinist tradition. We don’t want any idols. No images. No nothing that could replace God. And caring about creation could lead us to worship it. But I don’t think caring about this world will lead us to idolatry in the same way that caring for the poor or the children among us will lead us to worship them. By not loving what God has made, we have started caring more about we make, the clothes and gadgets and computers and ipods and iphones and all of our possessions and all the wealth we idolize. Caring more for God’s creation will help us not worship our creations.

Alright, well how about this, the church has said. We shouldn't get too attached to creation. After all, Jesus is going to come back again and we aren't meant to stay here. As a matter of fact, the sooner we use everything up, the sooner Jesus might come back. Anyway, it's OK if we use up the earth. Wow, can you imagine what kind of Creator would be OK with that. When God created, God wasn't planning to throw it all away. When God created, God called it good. God sent the Spirit and breathed God's own life into it. When God created, God put God's self into it. And God so loved the world, that God wouldn't give up on it. God would give God's own Son to save it. Because God loves creation. And Jesus commanded that we love God and love all that God loves, the second coming shouldn't matter. We wouldn't break other commandments and go off stealing and lying and killing just because the end is near. The good news is for us now and for the whole creation now.

Ok, but we have to be realistic. We can't change everything. All of our neighbors are still polluting up a storm. We can't do anything to stop the big companies from pumping out toxins into the air. We can't protect all

the tigers and wild apes and elephants and tree frogs and bats and Cumberland elktoe mussels and Running Buffalo clover. The list of endangered species is too long. Technology will advance sooner or later. Our grandkids will deal with it. We can't believe that our efforts will make much of a difference. But why don't you believe? Jesus asks upbraiding us. The good news of resurrection and life is for all creation. The poor will always be with you, but you wouldn't stop feeding them or clothing the naked or visiting the prisoners would you? Love doesn't shrug its shoulders and retire. It doesn't hand on problems to the next generation. Love doesn't excuse itself from loving. Love acts. Jesus says, we will need to make an account for our lives. Those of us who claim to love God. And God won't just be looking at our church attendance. Living the good news is about how we loved, how we proclaimed the goodness of life. So, let us believe. Let us love what God loves. Let us care for this earth. Not just for a day or a week. But let us proclaim that he is risen. At this table, in this church, and let us go out and proclaim to the whole creation that the Creator is for life.