

The Flowers Appear on the Earth

Song of Songs 2: 11-12

When I picked out this Scripture, we were in a different world, living in a different time. I assumed we would be having our usual Earth Day celebration, one in which we would lift up the work of our Green Chalice Team, one in which we would recommit ourselves to the Alverna Covenant. I assumed we would be having our usual Earth Day celebration one in which we would name the various images of God's creation found in our sacred text, that we would sing a few songs about the beauty of our world, and then in good Midway Christian Church fashion, have a potluck which would feature local foods our members discovered at farmers' markets and grocery stores.

This usual Earth Sunday celebration plan seems so long ago. It also seems disjointed and disconnected from where we are as a community of faith because our usual Earth Sunday celebration comes from a point of privilege. I could not in good faith pretend to preach that usual Earth Sunday celebration when just this morning, I came across story after story of how millions of people are standing in lines for hours waiting to receive food assistance. Our usual Earth Sunday celebration seems cruel and inauthentic when we know that food scarcity is becoming more prevalent with each passing day as more Americans file for

unemployment, people who after missing just one paycheck are struggling financially.

Again, I know that these realities have been here all along and as I said a few weeks ago, this crisis didn't reveal them. Rather it stripped away our privileged point of view, something which allowed us to ignore the pain and suffering of others because it did not affect us.

Yet, even as I hold these difficult truths in my heart, I know that the Earth is waking up in more ways than one and that experience is truly something to celebrate. After a long dark winter, the Earth in our part of the world is revealing its spring time wonder. Trees are budding. Flowers are blooming so much so that their beauty invites us to pause and enjoy nature's gift.

Also in this time of renewal, we are hearing stories of how the Earth is healing after years of abuse through pollution and over consumption, something we feared would never happen. This past fall in the Ethics class I taught, we watched documentaries on the climate crisis. These documentaries kept pointing out how close we were to the point of no return, to that point where we as humanity have done so much damage to our eco-system that it would bring about the extinction of all life here on Earth.

Moving us away from this point of no return is what we in Earth Care ministries have worked to bring about in all of our efforts. We have recycled. We have tried to reduce our carbon footprints. We have tried to think about our land usage and how to be better stewards of the Earth. We were trying everything we could to move us back from this point of no return but it seemed like our efforts were falling short every single time. Then this pandemic hit and a silver lining in all of it is that this pandemic has been able to do what we could not....slow or stop our abuse of the Earth through pollution or overconsumption. Just a few days ago, a photo was released of Mount Kenya which is now able to be seen from Nairobi, a sight which is so unusual due to pollution in that area that many claimed the picture had been photo-shopped. And in India, the Himalayas are able to be seen, a phenomenon which has not happened in over 30 years. It is happening now due to the drop in air pollution. These are just to name a few of the stories emerging of the way the Earth is healing itself.

And for us who have been a part of Earth Care ministries for years, for those of us who have tried to go green, each one of these stories of how the Earth is healing is an embodiment of our hope of renewal coming to fruition. They are glimmers of light in this time of uncertainty. They are signs of the Kingdom of God coming here on Earth as it is in heaven.

All of this was going through my mind as I sat down to write this sermon as well as the fact that this Wednesday, we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. As I pondered these things, I began to wonder what the work of Earth Stewardship will be like in this new normal, hoping that in our rush to return to some semblance of order, we will not completely go back to way things were because the way things were was not working. People were over worked and overstressed. Creation was being destroyed as we continued to pursue our consumeristic habits. Animal populations were going extinct because we decimated their habitats. All of this was going through my mind as I sat down to write this sermon, and I discovered that I had more questions than answers.

I know that this is the point in the sermon where I try to wrap everything up and leave us with an inspiring word or two to take us through the week...but again, as I just said I had more questions than answers. So what I will do is say that as people of faith, we have been given a gift...a gift of Sabbath, a gift of time to reframe our narrative, to think about who we are and whose we are, to wonder what it means to be in relationship not only with each other as brothers and sisters in Christ but in relationship with all creation because Creation is not just a backdrop to our lives. It is embedded in everything...from the air we breathe, to the food we eat, to the water we drink, to the very land which reveals its beauty to us, reminding us that the darkness will not have the last word.

It is my hope that we take this time of Sabbath, not as a moment of privilege but as a moment to ponder how Creation is an essential piece of the puzzle as we work to bring about healing and wholeness for all of God's people. Because as someone who is way smarter than me said: "If we don't know the natural world, we will neither enjoy it or protect it which is a shame really because in this web of creation, the thing which ties us all together, we don't know where people end and the earth begins." Amen.