



Westminster Presbyterian Church
Eugene, Oregon
“At Home” Worship
Earth Sunday April 19, 2020

Gathering Around God’s Word

If you are worshipping with another family member or with children, you are invited to have different voices share and read the various parts of the service.

Call to Worship

O Lord, how manifold are Your works:
IN WISDOM YOU HAVE MADE THEM ALL:
May the glory of the Lord endure forever:
LET US REJOICE IN ALL GOD’S WORKS!

Opening Hymn *For the Beauty of the Earth* #14

Call to Confession

Let us confess before God those things we have done or failed to do which caused us to be less effective stewards of God’s gifts

Responsive Prayer of Confession

O God, Your fertile earth is slowly being stripped of its riches:
OPEN OUR EYES TO SEE.

O God, Your living waters are slowly being choked with chemicals:

OPEN OUR EYES TO SEE.

O God, Your clear air is slowly being filled with pollutants:

OPEN OUR EYES TO SEE.

O God, Your creatures are slowly dying and Your people are suffering:

OPEN OUR EYES TO SEE.

God our Maker, so move us by the wonder of creation:

THAT WE REPENT AND CARE MORE DEEPLY.

So move us to grieve the loss of life:

THAT WE RESOLVE TO CHERISH AND PROTECT YOUR WORLD. AMEN

Assurance of Pardon

God's Word assures us: if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Prayer for Illumination

God Who made light to shine out of darkness; shine into our minds and hearts with the light of Your Word; through Christ our Lord. AMEN

Scripture Readings

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 24

¹The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it;
²for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.

³Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?
⁴Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully.
⁵They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation.
⁶Such is the company of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah
⁷Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.
⁸Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle.
⁹Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.
¹⁰Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah

New Testament Reading: Romans 8:18-25

¹⁸I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Sermon Whose Earth is It, Really?
The Rev. Arlen Salthouse

“The earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof”. So the Bible proclaims in Psalm 24 and elsewhere. Moreover, “The world and those who dwell therein” belong to God. So we Christians affirm, as with the Psalmist we recall God’s mighty act of founding this planet Earth upon the turbulent sea of primeval chaos, and establishing it upon the endless rivers of space.

Yes, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof; the world and those who dwell therein.” So we sing, “This is my Father’s world, and to my listening ears all nature sings and round me rings the music of the spheres. This is my Father’s world; I rest me in the thought of rocks and trees, of skies and seas, His hand the wonders wrought”. Surely there have been times we’ve stood at our kitchen windows to watch squirrels scamper to and fro, and listen to bird’s chirping gaily as they flit among the branches. Times we’ve stood in awe among the tall pines or redwoods; or at the sparkling water’s edge, and breathed air so crisp and clear you could almost hear God’s pronouncement of the goodness of His creation echoing round the edges of the universe. There were times we experienced the nobility of persons; known the kindness of strangers, and glimpsed our oneness with the entire human family. Then truly it seemed that “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof; the world and those that dwell therein”.

And yet! No sooner have those words tumbled from our lips, than we began to sense the irony. For have we not also seen the lifeless mangled bodies of squirrels and rabbits, dogs and deer, struck down by cars; and heard the pitiful cries of disabled birds with oil-coated wings? Have we not breathed the stench of smokestacks and

poison of a million exhausts? Have we not observed once pristine lakes, rivers and forests consumed by acid rain; parks littered and beaches strewn with putrid waste and oceans choked by plastic? Have we not seen or heard of clear cutting old growth forests in North America and rain forests in South America? Have we not been shocked at the tragic effects of global warming, reflected in the melting of millennia old glaciers? Have we not felt the sting of human cruelty and injustice? And seen the flickering flame of life snuffed out prematurely by drugs, alcohol and violence; or by the greed and selfishness that exploits the young and vulnerable? Have we not watched and listened to poisonous messages of bigotry and hate the often masquerade as patriotism and piety; hate that rends the human family into hundreds of fragments; leaving this planet littered with the corpses of earth's most precious resources?

At such times it may seem that the earth is anyone's but the Lord's; that it belongs to the greedy or aggressor; the ruthless and cunning; that it belongs to the bully; or uncaring mega corporations. Perhaps at times we've even concluded that this earth and its fullness belong not to God but the devil. Incidentally, there are passages of Scripture that seem to support that point of view; such as I John 5:19 which states, "We know that we are of God and the whole world is in the power of the evil one". It's unclear whether the writer had in mind Satan or Caesar. or whether there was much of a difference between the two. But take that literally, and by itself, and we might as well throw this morning's text right out the window; Alternatively, I propose that we spend a few minutes trying to reconcile the tension between those points of view. On the one hand, that the earth is the Lord's; and on the other, that the whole world is in the power of the evil one. For what we have here is a paradox. Like some other matters of faith that seem at odds, yet turn out to be equally true, Or rather, I should say the truth emerges only as we put together the story, relating what a first glance seems contradictory. For example, how can it

possibly be winter and summer at the same time The answer, of course, as every schoolchild knows, is when its winter in the Northern hemisphere, its summer in the Southern hemisphere. Its only by looking at the larger picture, of the whole globe, that we arrive at the answer. So it is with the nature of God; or even human nature for that matter, which can seem contradictory. But to return to the paradox of the ownership of this earth - the rule and Lordship of this world we live in, can bewilder, especially those who believe, or want to believe with Robert Browning, that “God’s in His heaven and all’s right with the world”; yet look round us and see in nature and humanity, so much devastation and ugliness, tragedy and violence; and can’t help but wonder, ‘Whose earth is it really?’ It can certainly lead one to despair.

Our New Testament readings however, provide an alternative to naively closing our eyes or giving in to hopelessness. For both passages begin with that basic assumption of Psalm 24, that we live in one great world created by God for a purpose; and in which all things and persons have a purpose. Oh, not in isolation surely, nor independent of one another; but each inter-dependent, links in a chain of purpose; and each finding its meaning in relationship with the whole. In the parable recorded in Mark 12, that inter-dependence is illustrated by the vineyard, the hedge round it, the pit, winepress, tower and tenants - none of which is of use without the rest, and each of which needs the others to fulfill its function. The key, of course, is those tenants, who in this instance happen to be the nastys who break the chain, don’t they By trying to take over, grabbing all the fruit for themselves, and seizing the land by force. The parable ends as our Lord indicates how the rightful owner puts those usurpers down and raises up others to fulfill their purpose within the chain of stewardship. In Matthew’s version of the parable, the closing words tell us how the owner, let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons:. Yes, the key is the tenants, isn’t it The key is people - men and women -

young and old - who don't look a whole lot different from us! Persons who make all the difference in the world, or in this vineyard we call Earth. See it all depends on folks like ourselves who are tenants in the vineyard; whether we acknowledge the rightful owner and act as good tenants for Him, faithful stewards who take care of business for the owner. Or alternatively, who do our own business, monkey business, or the devil's business, on God's time, with God's possessions. That's when we get things messed up, isn't it? When we play fast and loose; when we lose sight of God's purpose for Creation; break the chain of inter-dependence, and disrupt the fragile harmony of nature and humanity,

But lest we blame others, or throw up our hands in despair, Jesus gives that parable to jar us to responsibility, and challenges us to reclaim God's earth for Him. Similarly, those verses from Romans 8 remind us of our all-important role as stewards of creation. In verse 19 we're told that "...the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God." What's more, the creation has been groaning in labour until the children of God relieve the pain. And hey folks, that's us! for we are God's children! Indeed, the entire universe is waiting for us who know the Lord to restore the harmony and balance of nature and people, so all may know that this earth and its fullness is indeed the Lord's; the world and those who dwell therein. Those words are more urgent in our time than when they were written over 2000 years ago. So, let us commit ourselves to that end on this Earth Sunday. Let us praise the Lord for glimpses of that wholeness and purpose we've known in Christ. Thank God for the privilege of being tenants in His vineyard, and rededicate ourselves to being good tenants, faithful stewards of His creation. And let us look forward in hope to the day when the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of our God; and this earth and its fullness shall indeed be the Lord's.

Let us pray. Grant us, O Lord, that acknowledging Your ownership, both by virtue of creating and redeeming this earth; we may seek to make it so in our lives and in that corner of Earth where we dwell; so living as to be good tenants and stewards for You; in Jesus' name AMEN

Responding to God's Word

Affirmation of Faith

From the Iona Community

I believe in God, Who is love and has given the earth to all people.

I believe in Jesus Christ, Who came to heal us and to free us from all forms of oppression.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, Who works in and through all who are turned towards the truth.

I believe in the community of faith, which is called to the service of all people.

I believe in God's power to transform and transfigure, fulfilling the promise of a new heaven and a new earth where justice and peace will flourish. AMEN

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer for Earth Sunday:

We praise You, Creator God, for all Your mighty acts throughout the vast and wondrous universe. Especially for this planet Earth that You have made so good. For its rich diversity of people, animals and birds, wildlife and sea-life of every kind, we give You thanks. For earth's abundant resources and magnificent beauty, we give You thanks. May we never take it for granted nor treat it carelessly, but continuously stand in awe of all that You have made.

We thank You for the fellowship of all who care for this earth and pray that we may be numbered

among them. Teach us the interconnectedness of all persons and creatures; that we might prosper and grow with each other through respect and love.

We pray for the decision-makers in this and every nation – in government, industry and commerce. May they never put short-term profits, greed and self-interest ahead of the well-being of humans and nature.

There is no pain in our hearts or in our planet that You, O Lord, do not know; for You have touched even the lowest places on earth. Teach us to grieve with You, Lord, the loss of all the beauty that is being killed and resources squandered. We lift up all who struggle without adequate wholesome food, water or shelter; victims of war and other violence, pollution, wanton exploitation, disease and inadequate medical treatment.

Grant us assurance that no place is outside Your resurrection presence, for You fill all things in heaven and earth. Give us strength in Your victory over death to grow into Your way of love, which does not despair, but keeps sowing seeds of hope and making signs of wholeness and light even in the darkness.

We commend to Your mercy all the members of Your body, in this congregation and community and around the world; especially those facing difficult circumstances, that they may know Your loving presence and find meaning even in the midst of adversity.

Now hear our prayers for those known to us and to You in need of Your healing comfort and grace... Hear these and all our prayers in the name of our risen, living Lord, who taught us to pray,

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Sending of God's Word

Closing Hymn: *This is My Father's World* #370

Benediction

Go in peace and may the Lord go with you, today
and always. AMEN