

“Loving the Earth”

Sermon by Dan Harrison, pastor at Church of the Covenant, Lynchburg, VA 4/18/2021

Job 12:7-10

Some of you may know that I enjoy gardening, more specifically making small garden spaces to be enjoyed. We are lucky to live where we do. There are a lot of materials already on the property and I like to think I've taken advantage over the years to create small, enjoyable, meditative spaces with little ponds and fountains. On the property are a number of large, very heavy flag stones. I've moved several over time, getting them into place as beautiful edgings for the ponds especially. I also wanted to place two of them on top of these large tree stumps I have set up as meditation spots, to sit on. However, after a lot of work with my sons to wrestle one of these large flag stones on to one of the two stumps, we lacked the energy to do the second one. That was about two years ago. Since then, I have diligently tried on my own to wrestle the second rock into place, but it had a much further journey to go. It was further away, about 30 yards. I tried so many times just to edge it a few inches, and nothing. Much too heavy. This thing weighs hundreds of pounds. So, for two years I dreamed, schemed, and tried to devise ways to get it there. You might ask, you have three sons, why didn't you ask them to help. This stone was exceptionally far away and I knew it would need all three of my sons and myself to move it, and to be honest it is rare to have them all available at the same time, but a miracle happened this past Friday. I had all three of them with me in the late afternoon. We each grabbed one of the four corners of this giant flat stone, and after lifting it together, it was easily transported to its new spot, within seconds—and now it rests finally on its stump. I told them this was the best birthday present ever, and it took all four of us to do it, together, at the same time.

This earth we call our home is ours in the sense that it is creation created by our creator. We are a part of it. We are siblings. We cannot ignore our connection. Our very essence is wrapped into it. When Jesus tells us that the greatest command is to love God with all our heart, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves, which command is hardest. One person asked Jesus, “who is our neighbor?” Do you remember which story Jesus told as a response. The story of the Samaritan. I hesitate to say the “good Samaritan” because it implies that the others are “bad Samaritans.” It is the story of compassion that a man has on another, who could be considered his enemy, his oppressor. So, when I ask which is harder, of course, it's obvious: To love one's neighbor. This is the true measure of one's love for God, how the person loves others.

If this line of logic is correct, we can stretch it just a bit further to include creation as a whole. You can judge one's love for God by their love for Creation. As we celebrate Earth Day this week, may we embrace her, cherish her, and honor her. She is our home, heart. Our very essence comes from her. As the word Adam is the name for the first human, it is also the Hebrew word for Earth. We are one. If you damage one part of “Adamah,” any part at all, we should all feel it, because we are all one. It is obvious from our Creation stories that we are a product of the Earth, the Earth is not a product of us. This is why we often refer to her as Mother Earth, a way to honor her and remind ourselves that we are a part of her.

I will finish with a short children's fable. A long time ago in a village there lived a small family. The father was a carpenter and the wife was a seamstress. They both worked hard to provide for their two young sons. The two sons, however, did not appreciate what their parents did for them, preferring instead to be mischief makers throughout the small town. Everyone knew them and avoided them. The brothers often played jokes on the other people in the village. They had become such a nuisance that the village elders asked the parents to send their children away, please. The parents had no choice but to send the two boys to live with their aunt in the forest. Many said she was an old witch because she lived deep in the forest and only spoke with animals. The boys immediately rebelled against their aunt, beginning to cause mischief for her. However, she was very wise, and each time they tried to play a joke on her, she would catch them beforehand. The boys became frustrated. Finally, they decided to see if she really was as wise as everyone says she is, so they captured a beautiful butterfly, bringing it to her. The oldest brother said, "Look, auntie, I have caught a blue butterfly. It is here in the palm of my hands." He had hidden the butterfly in his hands so she couldn't see it. "I ask you one question: Is it dead or alive?" The boy had thought to outwit her --if she said it was dead, he'd simply release it alive but if she said it was alive, he'd crush it before he opened his hands, so as to prove her wrong. It was simple in his mind. He asked her again, "Wise aunt, is it dead or is alive."

She replied, "It is in your hands."

And likewise, how we love God, that is, how we love this magnificent Earth, is in our hands.

Shalom