

Celebrating the Earth Day Prayers, Easter 2 April 24, 2022

Prayer Concerns

Larry Seabrook, Evelyn Crafts' granddaughter Brittany, Rona's mother, Vi, Jenny & family, Randy Greer, Cathy Tredenick, Karl Crocker, Linda Hepburn, Sharon Axford, Lori Ann, Fraser, Clarence, Tucker Johnson, the people of Ukraine, Aleta Behie, Cherie Doyon, Shirley Griffin

Time for Silent Prayers

Morning Prayer Earth Day Prayer— Fiona Murdoch, Eco-Congregation Ireland

**God of the universe,
We thank You for Your many good gifts -
For the beauty of Creation and its rich and varied fruits,
For clean water and fresh air, for food and shelter, animals and plants.**

**Forgive us for the times we have taken the earth's resources
for granted
and wasted what You have given us.
Transform our hearts and minds
So that we would learn to care and share,
To touch the earth with gentleness and with love,
Respecting all living things.**

**We pray for all those who suffer as a result of our waste,
greed and indifference,
And we pray that the day would come when everyone has enough
food and clean water.**

**We long for the day when swords shall
be transformed into plowshares and
wars will only be found in history books.
Help us to respect the rights of all people and all species
And help us to willingly share your gifts
Today and always. Amen.**

Epistle Colossians 1: 15-20

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Sermon: IN CHRIST ALL THINGS CONSIST

The Reverend Margaret Bell, Pastor

Introduction: A YouTube Video: Every Day is Earth Day 2022

2022 marks the 52 Anniversary of Earth Day. But as the video suggests, every day should be Earth Day! Every day we should celebrate the wonders of a world which contain miracles of unfathomable mystery.

Earth Day was first marked in 1970, the year that I began high school. But back then I don't remember it often referred to--neither in school nor in the church. It wasn't until 1990 when I arrived here and Shirley Dale asked: "Are we were going to do anything to celebrate Earth Day?" that I recognized its significance. So, drawing inspiration and information from two long time reducers, re-users and recyclers: Shirley and Sally Martyn we marked Earth Day at Plains.

Since then, Earth Day and God's creation have been part of our worship focus. At Plains some adjustments have been made to become more environmentally friendly, such as using china cups for coffee time instead of the infamous Styrofoam cups, installing energy efficient lighting in the hall and sanctuary and using the recycling boxes.

Even though the erratic nature of weather patterns has become a dominant and everyday reminder of climate change, concerns about the nature of Mother Nature existed long before Earth Day was founded by an American Senator.

Nellie McClung, who helped lead the way in changing Canada's voting legislation to include women was also an environmentalist.

As a Christian she trusted in the Creator to one day bring about the new creation that was promised in both Testaments of Biblical writ. But she also recognized that it behooved humanity to be doing the Lord's work. Like that good old protestant work ethic says, "The Lord helps them who helps themselves."

Nellie McClung said: *"Let us do our little bit with cheerfulness and not take the responsibility that belongs to God. None of us can turn the earth around. All we can ever hope to do is to hit a few whacks in the right direction."*

Remember that Nellie's words were spoken more than a century ago. Now, in the light of current climate calamities you may agree that we all need to be doing more than hitting a few whacks in the right direction. And instead of leaving the responsibility to God, we must share the responsibility *with* God.

For the climate issues we face, which are more serious than they were when the first Earth Day was marked, requires a concerted effort by all of us. There needs to be a whole lot more 'whacking' and more people *agreeing* on which direction is the right one.

As I mentioned, when I was a youngster and young adult, issues around the environment and conservation wasn't a subject in my home church. Perhaps it was due to the fact that the members were farmers or from farming families. and they had a close relationship and a respect for the land. In those days, who knew the weather patterns better than a farmer? **NOBODY** did!

Mom grew up during Great Depression. Mom knew a lot about reusing— from making herself a coat from a hand me down coat she'd been given to saving bread tags, which she called 'dingles', and plastic milk bags. Mom saved Greeting cards she'd received and donated them to Child Day Cares or cut them down to make Christmas gift tags.

But times changed, as more and more people flowed into the cities, took up work in office towers and factories, and became estranged from the land. Believing that we had all the

answers, urban societies ignored, and dismissed the timeless and wise teachings of indigenous peoples, who promoted respect for the land. We continue to abuse the habitats of creatures which share this planet with us.

In the long story of the Christian church there have always been voices like St. Francis of Assisi who loved nature. There are legends that he talked to the animals. In his prayers he referred to “brother sun and sister moon.”

But Francis and other Saints like him were rare birds, let’s say. And they were not really known to protestants until the last century. Protestants, especially the more evangelical ones, like many Baptists, tended to view the world negatively. Less emphasis was placed by pulpiteers on how Christians should live in relation to creation except to teach a faith that would give them a future hope for a better life in heaven. A new earth, not a recycled one was the focus which God would accomplish at the end of times.

With the church’s focus fixed heavenward, it was easy to overlook how corporate humanity’s wasteful and selfish ways were causing increasing damage and suffering as rain forests disappeared, glaciers began to melt and oceans filled with plastic and pollinating insects were poisoned by insecticides.

However, over the past 52 years, since Earth Day was introduced, the world has slowly been shifting priorities and so has the church of Jesus Christ. Although the Church’s mission is still concerned with helping people find and nurture a loving relationship with God through Christ, the church has shaken the dust from mantle that had been left in Church’s closet. The mantle being our role as stewards of God’s creation.

Being good stewards of the earth and its creatures has always been a key Biblical teaching, but it was either misinterpreted or ignored way too often. Yet our mandate is right there in black and white, on the very first page of the Book of Genesis.

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, “Let us make humankind^[c] in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth,^[d] and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

The problems arose when humans preferred to interpret the word have dominion to mean ‘dominate, misuse and destroy at will’ to serve our selfish purposes. Now today, humanity is regretting the harmful seeds we’ve sown and the suffering we’ve reaped. And sadly, the humans who are suffering most from irresponsible and wasteful behaviors are not the ones who instigated these abuses. The poor, displaced, homeless and disenfranchised ones, the ones without political power are the biggest losers, along with many species of birds, bees, flowers, trees, and endangered mammals, reptiles and sea life.

All are victims of humanity’s corporate incompetence.

However, there is good news. The good news is that more and more people including the powerful are taking the health of our planet seriously. From Greta Thunberg and marches in the streets of major cities, the majority of people are aware and concerned about climate issues.

One of the positives that arose from the terrible pandemic was that when the industries were forced shut down, the gaping hole in the Earth’s ozone layer healed up. The air became cleaner to breathe. The birds were delighted and sang out their praises. It’s like Mother Earth took the chance given her to take a great, deep sigh of relief. Last week was National Wildlife week in Canada. It was created in the 1940’s and the date was chosen to include April 10, the birthday of Jack Miner, a great conservationist.

One of Jack's major conservation concerns back in the day was the significant depletion of Canada Geese. Well, I think we could say, problem solved Jack! Those events and movements of good stewardship remind us that the Earth has a tremendous capacity to rebound, to heal, to recycle itself.

We were also reminded by all the clanging pots and balcony serenades and sidewalk messages that we are all in this together! And when humanity comes together for a good purpose, miracles can happen. This truth gives us hope and the incentive to, as Nellie McClung recommended, direct as many 'whacks' as we can muster and be more devoted stewards of God's global garden.

The human species, whether we are atheist or Anglican, Buddhist or Baptist, Muslim or Methodists, Indigenous or European, are family. We are the children of God. The Creator in Genesis not only gave us our assignment as stewards. God called us 'very good.' God created *us* in his likeness, with the capacity to do great things if we choose to love our neighbors as ourselves. Part of loving others, is providing a safe and healthy place for them to live and thrive.

We are all in this world together. And God is in this world with us. That's the message that the author was sending to the church in Colossae. The scripture we read today holds special significance to me, beyond its message, for it contains the motto of the Seminary and University that awarded me two degrees. This motto, unlike most Universities was not written in Latin, but in Greek. Although McMaster University is a publicly funded institution. it retains its historic Greek motto, likely to honor its historic roots as a Baptist College. McMaster Divinity College which sits in the center of the campus also retains the same motto to this day. The words are taken from Colossians 1:17: "In Christ all things consist." Our Bibles say 'hold together' instead of 'consist' but it holds the same meaning. My seminary professor stressed that Jesus Christ is described in this verse as the one who envelopes not just people, but the material world of planets *and* creatures and stars *and* galaxies. That means that we humans are not the only things that matter to God. God cares and loves all the works of God's hands and heart. And if God loves the sparrows and the gnats, the oaks and the olives, the seas and the creeks, the fields and the flocks, then they should matter to us. If in Christ all things hold together, then it really is our responsibility to be Christ's arms and hands and voices --- his incarnate presence, embracing his world. The ministry of Earth care truly is the church's ministry.

So, let us not leave it to others to do the work that Christ calls us both to do and be. As Nellie McClung said, "*let's keep on hitting a few whacks in the right direction*" and trust that God, who holds this world together --- will indeed make all things new!
Amen

