

EcoFaith Summit Reflections

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March 30, 2019

Deut.30:19-20a; Psalm 104: 1, 5, 10-24, 35b; Ezekiel 47: 1, 9, 12; Romans 8:18-23 (printed at the end of this document)

Grace and peace to you from God the Creator, Christ the Word who was spoken, and the Spirit who bathes all of the world with life.

So, my new friends, I have some important questions for all of us:

Are we listening? Do we have ears to hear the world around us?

And if we are listening, what is it that we hear?

Do we hear, with Romans, the lament of all creation?

Paul tells us that “we know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now...” Perhaps we hear the creation groaning, trying to continue life as God’s child. Perhaps we lament with the whole creation and cry along. Do we hear the groan with empathy and compassion, taking on the suffering of the other? Perhaps, with God’s help, we acknowledge our complicity, and, in so far as we are able, we work to alleviate the pain.

We are told by Moses in Deuteronomy as we look, alongside the people of ancient Israel, over the vast land that lies open before us, that we have a choice. We have the option to choose life over death, blessing rather than curse. And here’s the thing. Heaven and Earth stand as witnesses concerning our choice. Perhaps this is part of what we are hearing from creation: the testimony of God’s witness as we stand trial. “Hey, you people, I see this plastic in the ocean, and you stand accused!” “Oh, you humans, I notice that all my fossils are being used up!” “Come on folks, don’t you notice that a lot of us out here are disappearing!” Heaven and earth and all that is in it are testifying concerning us (or perhaps they are testifying against us... rather ironically this little preposition (*‘al*) in Hebrew means both “concerning” and “against”).

We are shown again and again in Scripture that **creation responds to the choices we make and the actions we take**. When we are out of joint with nature or with each other, when we fail to live up to our calling and responsibilities to serve God and one another including all creatures, when we fail to live justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God, then nature responds as a world out of joint, as a creation out of sync with its creatures. Creation stands as a witness. Have we chosen blessings or curse, life or death?

Which brings us to yet another question: What is it to choose life?

Perhaps choosing life begins by admiring the vast world around us. More than admire... what if we see ourselves as just one part of all that God has created?

What happens when we see wearing the eyeglasses of Psalm 104? We notice the springs becoming rivers, as the wild beasts drink their fill. We listen to the birds as they build their nests. We actually watch the grass grow for the cattle and admire the sun and moon as markers of time. We listen to the roar of the lion. We humans are there in the midst of this creation, being fed and refreshed with wine, working the fields and sailing ships, just one creature in the vast web of life.

²⁴ How manifold are your | works, O LORD!
In wisdom you have made them all;
The earth is full | of your creatures.

³⁵ **Bless the LORD, O my soul. | Hallelujah!**

Abraham Heschel, the great Jewish scholar, spoke of Psalm 104's character as "a psalm of wonder or radical amazement" which leads to reverence. And reading or singing this psalm, even in part, certainly does just that. But what if we go one step further? What if, in our singing, we are joining our voices to those of the entire chorus of creation? What if we are not merely admiring but joining with, as St. Francis would have it, Brothers Sun and Wind, Sisters Moon and Water, and Mother Earth?

I am transported in these moments to our yearly Easter vigil as we march together to the baptismal font singing Psalm 148, "All you works of the Lord, praise the Lord!" In Scripture, giving praise, giving glory is a weighty, a substantial matter. One always gives glory with more than one's voice. We give glory with our lives. If we do not hear the voices of the earth and all her creatures singing along side of us, then we should note how and why the instruments and chorus are out of tune and retune them. When I am wondering in the woods outside Grand Marais, I can sometimes hear the deafening and exhilarating sounds of the peeper frogs, and they sound an awful lot like they are singing! God is both listener and conductor as we sing sweet praises together with all fellow creatures of the earth. The earth's lament becomes praise.

And yet a final voice of creation might be heard emanating from our baptismal fonts. It is a voice we often hear most clearly in dreams and vision. This voice comes from God's baptismal promises expanded beyond our wildest imagining. What if this font stands at the center of our twenty-first century temple? And now we hear the voice heard by Ezekiel.

And we see the water flowing from this temple fountain in all directions. And these waters become a river. (look at the banners!) And “wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish, once these waters reach there. It will become fresh; and everything will live where the river goes.”

¹²On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.

I love this vision for all sorts of reasons. I love the wild waters of chaos transformed into a life-giving, fresh water river. It is as though the waters themselves, like those listening to Deuteronomy, must choose life or death, blessings or curse. These waters choose life!

I love that every swarming creature lives. We can add to this picture animals gathered by the rivers, drinking their fill, like the wild beasts of Psalm 104. Animals thrive here.

And I love the trees. I confess to being a kind of Tree of Life junkie for all kinds of reasons. The ultimate tree of life is the cross. Here it is among the banners! In Ezekiel’s vision the myriad trees, receiving living water from the river, respond by themselves giving life (like the water from the side of Jesus, mixed with blood). They give life as sustenance through their fruit. And they give life as shade and protection... indeed their leaves are for the healing of the nations. Might one imagine they’re being there also for the healing of all creation? The flourishing of creation is good for all.

And finally, I love that the source of the waters is the temple. Our font, if you will. What if we take this promised vision to heart? What if the fonts of our many congregations were to become the place of the outflowing of living water? I carry a visual image of this from the church where Luther was baptized in Eisleben. The war-destroyed but now rebuilt church has a baptismal font sunken into the floor in the middle of the church. On the floor are concentric circles moving from the baptismal pool through the rippled stained glass windows, out the door, and into the street. The waters of baptism lead the church into the world.

What if our fonts welcomed and fed all creation with water and fruit?
What if we provided trees whose leaves in turn provided healing?

Here is a vision to look to and to find strength for the journey.

The promise of this vision never absolves us of responsibility. Rather, this promise undergirds the very hope that makes our responsible living possible. We are a baptized community of and for the world.

Thanks be to God.

Deut.30:19-20a

This day, I call upon heaven and earth to witness concerning you,
that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse;
therefore choose life that you and your descendants may live,
loving the Lord your God, obeying God's voice, and cleaving to the Lord.
(Diane Jacobson translation)

Psalm 104 (ELW):

¹ **Bless the LORD, | O my soul;**

O LORD my God, you are very great!
You are clothed with majes- | ty and splendor.

⁵ **You set the earth upon | its foundations,
so that from now until forever it shall nev- | er be moved.**

¹⁰ You made the springs in- | to rivers
that flow be- | tween the mountains.

¹¹ **All the wild beasts drink their | fill from them,
and the wild donkeys | quench their thirst.**

¹² Beside them the birds of the air | make their nests
among the branches they | lift their voice.

¹³ **From your dwelling on high, you wa- | ter the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit | of your works.**

¹⁴ You make grass grow for the cattle, and plants to serve | humankind;
that they may bring forth food | from the earth,

¹⁵ **wine to gladden human hearts, oil to | make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the | human heart.**

¹⁶ The trees of the | LORD are well supplied,
the cedars of Lebanon | that you planted,

¹⁷ **in which the birds | build their nests,
while the stork makes the fir | trees its dwelling.**

¹⁸ The high mountains belong to | the mountain goats,
and the stony cliffs are a refuge | for the badgers.

¹⁹ **You made the moon to | mark the seasons,
and the sun knows the time | of its setting.**

²⁰ You bring on darkness that it | may be night,
in which all the beasts of the | forest prowl.

²¹ **The lions roar | for their prey
seeking their | food from God.**

²² The sun rises, and | they withdraw
and lay themselves down | in their dens.

²³ **People go forth | to their work
and to their labor un- | til the evening.**

²⁴ How manifold are your | works, O LORD!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full | of your creatures.

³⁵ **Bless the LORD, O my soul. | Hallelujah!**

Ezekiel 47:1,9,12 (NRSV)

¹Then he brought me back to the entrance of the temple; there, water was flowing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east); and the water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar.

⁹Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish, once these waters reach there. It will become fresh; and everything will live where the river goes.

¹²On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.

Romans 8:18-23 (NRSV)

¹⁸ I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰ for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that 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. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³ and 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.

ELW #771 God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens

Holy Manna - Text: Catherine Cameron; Tune: W. Walker, *Southern Harmony*

God, who stretched the spangled heavens infinite in time and place,
Flung the suns in burning radiance through the silent fields of space:
We, your children in your likeness, share inventive pow'rs with you;
Great Creator, still creating, show us what we yet may do.

We have ventured worlds undreamed of since the childhood of our race;
known the ecstasy of winging through untraveled realms of space;
probed the secrets of the atom, yielding unimagined power,
facing us with life's destruction or our most triumphant hour.

As each far horizon beckons, may it challenge us anew;
Children of creative purpose, serving others, hon'ring you.
May our dreams prove rich with promise; each endeavor well begun;
Great Creator, give us guidance till our goals and yours are one.