

Genesis 2:4b-9, 15 ~ Luke 24:13-35
 Honor Your Partner: *Now our Minds are One*
 3rd Sunday of Easter ~ Earth Care Sunday ~ April 23, 2023
 The Rev. Dr. Laurie Brubaker Davis

Sermon

Howdy, partner! Anybody every square danced? I happen to know we actually have some competition level square dancers right here in our FPC congregation. There may be more, but I am aware of two who would not want me to out them. I will say, they are on the Board of Deacons... This unnamed couple could surely demonstrate the proper way to "Honor your partner." This is a basic call that occurs at the beginning of a square dance, where you bow to each other at the same time. Let's try it, just sitting in our pews. A little bow from the waist. Good!

Now, say your partner was a caterpillar? Or a lion? Or perhaps a bee? How could these creatures also be our partners? Why would we honor them? Perhaps this sounds a little "new agey" or just a little too eco-wacko for you. Maybe you wonder what all this earth care talk has to do with being a Christian. Listen to what the medieval German Catholic theologian Meister Eckhart wrote back in the late 1200's (over a thousand years ago!)

Apprehend God in all things, for God is in all things.

Every single creature is full of God and is a book about God.

Every creature is a word of God.

If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature—even a caterpillar—

I would never have to prepare a sermon. So full of God is every creature.ⁱ

Sounds good to me! Being a weekly preparer of sermons, this advice of Meister Eckhart certainly got my attention! I am also struck by the way Meister Eckhart's' medieval Christian theology resonates with the "Thanksgiving Address" from Robin Kimmerer's book, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*.ⁱⁱ In it she writes that this "Thanksgiving Address" is river of words is as old as the people themselves. She explains that its name is known more accurately in the Onondaga language as the "Words That Come Before All Else." These words help us to set gratitude as our highest priority. You will find seven parts of it on your "Daily Guide to show Gratitude for Creation" card in your bulletin. We hope you will keep that card, take it home, put it somewhere that will help remind you every day to begin with gratitude for various aspects of God's amazing creation.

I was inspired by their instruction to begin every day, wherever our feet first touch the earth, by sending greetings and thanks to all members of the natural world. In other words, to start each day, at the moment when your feet first touch the earth, by "honoring our partners" which includes *all* members of the natural world. Do try this at home: every morning when your feet first touch the earth (or your bedroom floor), pause for half a second, take a breath, say "Thank you, God" and offer a bow. Notice how that shifts up your mental framework and perspective. Whatever challenges you are facing that day, bringing your mind in line with God and all God's creatures, will definitely help. From this position of humble gratitude, we can begin

to find our common ground, our unity across all differences—not only differences in station and status, race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, but also across species: animal, vegetable, mineral. Biblical scholar Patricia Tull explains that biblical Hebrew had no separate words for “human culture” and “nature.” What a long way we have come from this biblical witness, of being part and parcel of the natural world!

Why should we as Christ followers partner with all creation, seeking to be in harmony with the world? The first reason you in our first scripture lesson that Linda read. From the beginning of God’s creation: we were given the vocation that we all share in Gen. 2:15 “to serve and preserve the garden.” A fuller translation of Genesis 2:15 means to work and serve it, to preserve and observe it. From Genesis to Revelation, God sets down our primary purpose on earth: to love and care for God’s Garden, aka earth. The Tree of Life first appears in Genesis 2 and continues all the way to Rev. 22:1-2. Friends: our foundational creation stories tell the truth about the “who” and the “why” of creation. We are from the soil, bound to it, and interdependent upon it. The first human being, named “*Adam*”, comes from the Hebrew word, “*Adamah*” which means soil. Yes: we are of the earth. Our name is mud. Turn to your partner on either side of you in the pew and say to them, “Hi Mud!”

From our second lesson comes our hope, as Christians, that we can do something to save this world that Jesus came to save. On the third day, God raised Christ from the dead. How impossible is that? Once Cleopas and his friend saw Christ, they realized how their hearts had been burning within them as they were walking along with him to Emmaus. They ran seven miles back to Jerusalem to tell their buddies. That same burning, the fire that ignited in their hearts fuels the turn God is calling us to make today! Friends, we are perfect for the job. We are all about the impossible. God frees us in Christ to keep doing a new thing, in which every positive change matters. Remember that God sees us not for what we have already done, but for what we might yet do. Isn’t that good news, earthlings!!

You may have heard the report this week about the new research that shows the massive ice sheets at the top and bottom of our planet are shrinking much faster than previously thought. The international study compiled satellite measurements over time and depict what one researcher described as a “devastating trajectory.” As we’re losing ice from these areas, the coastal erosion means we’re losing land. Since we have already put a lot of polluting gases into the atmosphere, we can expect sea levels to rise during the 2030 and 2040s—that amount of sea level rise has been baked in, due to our past actions. Whether or not the sea level rises *after that time period* depends on what human actions we take now and in the next decade to address climate change. The kind of climate our children and our grandchildren depends on what we do now in this decade.ⁱⁱⁱ Seventh generation thinking begins now. It’s not too late. Friends, here’s the good news: there is no expiration date on climate action for our Pretty Planet.

Did you want to work for justice? Honor your partner. All injustices, if you think about it, stem from our failure to live into this partnership. Whether it is our failure to honor an individual or group of people; we are failing our God-given purpose to tend, preserve, protect. We can find help from unexpected quarters of creation. Creatures we may overlook as sources of wisdom.

Yet Joanna Macy helps us to see and consider specifically what we can learn from our fellow-creature partners. They indeed have gifts that will help us. As Joanna Macy, environmental activist, author, and scholar of Buddhism has written:

"We hear you, fellow-creatures. We know we are wrecking the world and we are afraid. What we have unleashed has such momentum now, we don't know how to turn it around. Don't leave us alone, we need your help. You need us too for your own survival. Are there powers there you can share with us?

'I, lichen work slowly, very slowly. Time is my friend. This is what I give you: patience for the long haul and perseverance.'

'It is a dark time. As deep-diving trout I offer you my fearlessness of the dark.'

'I, lion, give you my roar, the voice to speak out and be heard.'

'I am caterpillar. The leaves I eat taste bitter now. But dimly I sense a great change coming. What I offer you, humans, is my willingness to dissolve and transform. I do that without knowing what the end-result will be, so I share with you my courage too.'"^{iv}

Did you know that one of our powers, homo sapiens, is our tongue and our ability to talk! The most important action you can take to save our planet is to talk about climate change. In a recent survey the question was asked: "How many times a year do you hear someone else talk about climate change." It turns out that about 75 percent of people said less than one or two times a year. Why should we expect someone to care about something that they never hear anyone talk about? Why would we expect someone to think that the problem can be fixed if we never hear anyone talk about solutions? We may be scared to talk about climate change because we worry it will pick a fight, or we will have to argue about science, or it is just doom and gloom, such a downer. But there are lots of positive ways we can connect climate with things people already care about, to talk about why it matters to us and what we can do about it.

In John 3:16, that iconic, quintessential verse, at the very heart of our Christian tradition and theology, right there we find this truth, this seed planted in the soil of our faith: For God so loved the world, God so loved all of creation, that God sent God's very self, in the form of human being, a new *Adam*, named Christ, to redeem all of creation. Honor your partners; honor your part in Christ's work of redemption. That is our work, Beloved Community. Before we say, "See you later partner," I offer you this poem by Mary Oliver, about our shared work, as we wake up and put our feet on the earth. It is titled, "The Messenger."

My work is loving the world.

Here the sunflowers, [gesture]

there the hummingbird—[gesture]--equal seekers of sweetness.

Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums.

Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.

Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?

Am I no longer young, and still not half-perfect? Let me

*keep my mind on what matters,
which is my work,*

*which is mostly standing still and learning to be
astonished.*

The phoebe, the delphinium.

The sheep in the pasture and the pasture.

Which is mostly rejoicing, since all the ingredients are here,

*which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart
and these body-clothes,*

*a mouth with which to give shouts of joy
to the moth*

and the wren,

to the sleepy dug-up clam,

telling them all over and over, how it is

that we live forever.^v

ⁱ Meister Eckhart, *Earth Prayers: From Around the World, 365 Prayers, Poems, and Invocations Honoring the Earth*, edited by Elizabeth Roberts & Elias Amidon, (New York, NY: Harper One, 1991), p. 251.

ⁱⁱ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, (Canada: Milkweed Editions, 2013), pp.105-117.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/ice-sheets-in-greenland-antarctica-melting-faster-than-previously-thought-research-shows#:~:text=Newsletters-ice%20sheets%20in%20Greenland%2C%20Antarctica%20melting,than%20previously%20thought%2C%20research%20shows&text=New%20research%20shows%20that%20the,much%20faster%20than%20previously%20thought>

^{iv} Joanna Macy, *Earth Prayers: From Around the World, 365 Prayers, Poems, and Invocations Honoring the Earth*, edited by Elizabeth Roberts & Elias Amidon, (New York, NY: Harper One, 1991), p.280.

^v"Messenger" from *Thirst: Poems by Mary Oliver*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2006), p.1.