

Right here, now

Genesis 1:1-25

John 1:1-14

Today we are celebrating Earth Sunday and what beautiful weather we have for it. Our readings this morning reflect God's total involvement with creation.

Do you remember that Bette Midler song "From a Distance"? The lyrics go like this:

From a distance the world looks blue and green
And the snow capped mountains white
From a distance the ocean meets the stream
And the eagle takes to flight

From a distance there is harmony
And it echoes through the land
It's the voice of hope
It's the voice of peace
It's the voice of every man

The song goes on to say that from a distance you don't see our divisions, war seems pointless and there is hope. It's a beautiful song, but there is one repeated line that bothers me:

God is watching us
God is watching us from a distance

God is not watching us, my friends, and certainly not from a distance. God is right here with us. God is right here in the middle of everything. God is right here in the confusion of our lives, in the fear and anxiety and pain of the coronavirus. God is in the emergency rooms and the ICUs and at the bedside of each one who is dying and surrounding each one who is agonized by separation from a loved one in pain.

The whole creation is being created right before our very eyes. Creation is not a done thing which happened with the big bang or the original word of God, no we live in a constantly expanding, constantly changing universe of which we and God are integral parts. As if it wasn't enough that God's spirit animates every living thing, God sent his Son, his very self to become flesh: to take on human body and human consciousness. So that God became an embodied part of the creation that God is creating.

And that we are creating with God. For we are co-creators – we humans have been given free will and agency. What we do matters. What we do and how we pray and how we are qualitatively in our lives makes a difference.

And as we look at this little part of creation that God has given to us to nurture and sustain, we see that we have not made a very good job of it, especially since the 1970s. Since the 1970s we have totally messed up the climate – it was happening before but since then it has gone wild. In

our lifetimes we have benefited from using too many resources and burning too much carbon and making too much methane.

Our generation has benefited from the exploitation of the earth in a way never seen before. And it is up to us to do everything we can to redress that balance so that our grandchildren will be able to enjoy even a little of what we have enjoyed. It is up to us to take steps so that the poorest of the poor will still be able to fish in the oceans and gather food from vegetation.

If I were an Old Testament prophet I would probably be telling you that God is angry with us and the coronavirus is a punishment for our sins. I don't actually think that God gets angry and punishes like that, but I do think that there are consequences of behavior.

Although there is no direct evidence that the pandemic is the result of climate change there is at least a strong intuitive connection. As the climate warms up, so the range of life-threatening bacteria and viruses becomes greater. As the planet warms up, every eco-system is stressed and is more vulnerable to outside threats.

Planetary warming is happening. Its effects are already with us, and it is not going to get better unless we humans are able to make huge changes in the way we do things. And that means that you and I have to consider making sacrifices in the way we live. In preparation for today, the Earthcare group invited some of us to complete green cards with actions that we will take that can make a difference. The actions suggested ranged from eating lower down the food chain – in other words, less meat, more plants to installing solar panels. We will be offering these pledges to God with our offertory this morning.

I know that many of us are already doing many things, but there is always a next step. It is going to take a lot of small actions by small households like ours to change the culture of the nation and of the world. Our legislators need to hear from us how important it is that we work towards reducing global warming even with everything else that's going on.

Just a few weeks ago the county Integrated Waste Management Authority decided to put the ban on Styrofoam on hold for a year because of the need for restaurants to use takeout containers during this time, and the fear that a sensible move to keep Styrofoam which cannot be recycled and doesn't degrade for 500 years, a sensible move to keep Styrofoam out of the environment, out of the landfills, will be detrimental to business. I don't know if you have noticed but most businesses have already moved to using compostable or other more eco-friendly containers. I'm not sure which businesses will suffer from the ban, but the earth will suffer from the delay.

Sheltered in our homes we can still write letters and make phone calls and we can still make changes in our own lifestyles. Let us not allow the immediacy of the pandemic to blind us to the longer-term necessity for change. We humans are much better at responding to an emergency that is right in front of us – we are hard-wired for that – than one which is unfolding slowly and subtly. The slow-burning disaster is easy to ignore and pretend it will just go away.

But we are not alone as we work for the greening of planet Earth. We are not alone as we prayerfully consider our next steps. We are not alone as we work for a fair and just society. Because God is right here. God is with us. To quote from another Bette Midler song, God is “the wind beneath our wings.” We are co-creators with God. Co-creators. God has the big job and we

get to help. As Bishop Lucinda reminded the clergy a few weeks ago - you are the workers not the master-builder; you are the ministers not the Messiah.

It is not all up to us, and paradoxically it is all up to us. God is not going to step in and save us unless we ask and unless we work to create the future that we want for those who come after us. But just as God heard the cry of the Hebrews in Egypt, God hears our cries. Just as God appeared to Moses in an ordinary bush, so God may appear to us in an ordinary bush, an ordinary plant, an ordinary tree. Because God is right here, right now, blessing every feeble attempt we make to be the Body of Christ in this place.