

Sermon – Trinity Church Seattle
July 9, 2017
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Please pray with me: “We praise You, O God, for all your works are wonderful.
Your wisdom made the heaven and the earth, O God;
You formed the land then set the lights;
And like the sun, your love will rule today,
And stars will grace the night.
We praise You, O God, forever is your love.” Amen.

As you can see, I brought a prop along with me today. I not only keep this Hugg-a-Planet in a prominent place in my home, I also give this blue ball to my young nieces and nephews as they begin to understand what it means to live on Mother Earth together with all peoples and the whole of creation. This Hugg-a-Planet is a constant reminder that truly the “world is charged with the grandeur of God,” in the words of Gerard Manly Hopkins. I think back to a pitch-dark night along the coast of the Indian Ocean. Slowly a great Leatherback Turtle emerged from the sea, made her way up along the sand to dig a hole with her flippers where she then laid her eggs, and covered the hole to protect those life-giving eggs until they hatched. An ancient ritual performed from time immemorial. I remember, too, the morning, well before dawn, when with Jim Whittaker and our Turner camera crew, we set out to climb Pinnacle Peak to film the sunrise over our Mount Rainer. She was a radiant pink in the soft morning glow. I am sure we all chased fireflies, wondered at the beauty of tiny lady bugs, blew dandelion seeds into the air and continue to this day to stand in awe of the myriad natural wonders we see, hear, touch, taste and smell. I hope at the end of my reflection, each of you, as you take hold of your own memories of Earth’s wondrous beauty, will hug our planet and make a promise of one thing you will do to care for this Earth home of ours.

This planet Earth is our home – to date the only one that can nurture and sustain life as we know it. “There is no Planet B,” as the saying goes, We are here in this spot – Seattle – surrounded by glacial waters and majestic peaks. Within these historical times and on this beautiful finite and fragile Earth home, we each make our imprint and leave our footprint. What sort of imprint is each of us making? How heavy or light is that footprint?

Just contemplating this small blue ball that spins in space is awe-inspiring. When we think of the scriptural story of creation, we are humbled when we consider that as God finished lovingly creating earth, sky, waters, birds, mammals and humans, God saw creation not only good but very good. We reflect, too, that this God delighted in creation, walked in the garden, molded creatures from the dirt, and rested and reflected on the seventh day, the Sabbath. Our God is a God who embraces the material. In fact, as John relates, God so loves this world, that “the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us.” The Incarnation is God’s ultimate revelation of herself and is a sign of just how much God values creation.

Just think, Earth is God's creation and God's home. In Christian tradition, we are people of the Incarnation, "the loving event that draws heaven and earth together."ⁱ

The scientific account of creation, the evolutionary unfolding of a garden, of course, is longer, more complex, just as awe-inspiring, and still God's loving creation. Nearly 14 billion years ago a massive, violent explosion, the Big Bang, occurred, bringing into being the material universe, which has expanded and cooled every since. In the passing of billions of years, in the mix of elements, chemicals and gases, the first galaxies and stars formed. Ultimately, out of the elements stars disgorge, we humans were formed. We are stardust. We are earthlings from the soil. Within our own cosmic family of sun and planets, our Earth home, over billions of years, gradually evolved to become a home for life and ultimately for intelligent life. And over the past 10,000 years of the Holocene Era, our Earth has been the Goldilocks Planet, just right for nurturing and sustaining life as we know it. Bill McKibben in *Eaarth* notes: "For the 10,000 years that constitute human civilization, we've existed in the sweetest of sweet spots." Due to its "just right" distance from the sun, liquid surface water is available. The ozone layer offers the protection necessary for life forms to emerge from water and thrive on land. Agriculture is possible because of Earth's orbit and tilt.ⁱⁱ And because of agriculture, civilizations could develop and flourish during the "Holocene oasis of climatic stability."ⁱⁱⁱ

We humans are late-comers – even billions of years spanning between the appearance and unfolding of life on earth and the appearance of *Homo sapiens*. When we ask how we are doing in maintaining our stable Holocene state, we need to acknowledge that as care-givers, as stewards, of our finite and fragile planet, humans are found wanting. Our historical time is coming to be known as the Anthropocene and the Age of the Sixth Mass Extinction, for we humans, through our activities, through our overuse of earth's finite resources and increasing emissions of greenhouse gases into earth's atmosphere, have become the single dominant geophysical force in altering the natural world. And we humans are bringing about this change at a speed and a scale which author Diane Ackerman likens to an asteroid slamming into the Earth.^{iv}

Today, our human footprint is much larger than the global ecosystem can accommodate. We are living beyond the ecological capacity of the earth to continue to carry, nourish and enable humans and all of creation to flourish. Pope Francis in his powerful encyclical *Laudato si* calls our generation to build a culture that will face and address our ecological crisis, a culture that will "hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."^v As I walked with refugees and now with those being displaced by extreme weather events, I see clearly that it is the world's poorest and most vulnerable populations who suffer the most from our human induced climatic changes, yet who bear virtually little or no responsibility for the climate crisis. Francis reminds us that the climate is a complex system and a common good, belonging to all, meant for all and needed by all for life to flourish.^{vi} Everything we see around us comes from nature – from the carrots we eat to the cell phone that keeps us in touch with those we love. Nature is the source of our wealth and well-being. And all is interconnected and interdependent in this mysterious web of life.

In this, our particular historical time and place, we are called to live the great commandment of love – love of God and our neighbors as ourselves – as stewards of God’s good creation in new and transformative ways. Our caring for creation and our love of God and neighbor are integrally intertwined. We are called to write a new narrative, a new story, actually, a new theology of our relation with nature, our common Earth home, so that the earth and all its peoples can live sustainably and peacefully. In reality, this is a time of unique, exciting opportunity to move forward collectively in caring for creation in both big and small ways. With our abundance of knowledge, technology, and fertile creative imaginations, we can dream big and still remain within earth’s plentiful, planetary boundaries – dream of new ways to build our cities and transport systems, strive for agricultural efficiency, cutting waste and water as we produce our food. We can meet one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century of increasing global food supply without diminishing our forests or creating more cropland to feed 9 billion people by mid century. We can create a more circular economy rather than our current fossil fuel, consumer intensive, linear way of living. As Paul Hawken says: “We can just as easily have an economy that is based on healing the future rather than stealing it.”^{vii} Along with increasing our use of renewable energies, we can create as well the infrastructure for their far-flung transmission, including smart, solar electric producing highways. At the same time locally and individually, we can change the “I” of me to the “we” of us. We can reduce, reuse, recycle, use LED lights, turn off the water when brushing our teeth, purchase energy efficient appliances and low flow toilets, practice composting, cut way back on our food waste, turn back our thermostats, plant a garden – even participate in community gardening, bike or use public transport more frequently, buy locally, engage in advocacy for greater use of renewable energies, and strive always for eco-justice, keeping in our minds and hearts that God’s creation, our Earth home, belongs to all.

Each of us makes a mark on the earth and all creation. How we live with one another and all creation matters. How we embrace the great commandment to love one another as our God loves us matters. In momentary, quiet reflection before we continue our liturgy and receive the bread and wine of heaven and earth, I ask that each of you in mind and heart and with great thanksgiving hug this planet home of ours and make one promise of something that you will do to preserve “the fragile balance of life” on our Earth home.^{viii} Amen.

ⁱ Joshtrom Kureethadam, *Creation in Crisis: Science, Ethics, Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2014), 47. Pope Francis, *Laudato si*, paragraph 236.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, 47.

ⁱⁱⁱ Johan Rockstrom and Mattias Klum, *Big World Small Planet: Abundance Within Planetary Boundaries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 63.

^{iv} Diane Ackerman, *The Human Age: The World Shaped By Us* (New York: W.W> Norton & Company, 2014) 36.

^v Pope Francis, *Laudato si*, paragraph 49.

^{vi} *Ibid.*, paragraph 23.

vii Paul Hawken (Editor), *Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017), 217.

viii BBC Film, *Earth* (2009)