

Sermon on the Third Sunday of Easter
St. James Episcopal Church
San Francisco, California
April 22, 2007
by The Rev. Mary Moore Gaines

There is a soul force in the universe, which, if we permit it, will flow through us and produce miraculous results.

Mahatma Gandhi

Human beings, vegetables, or cosmic dust - we all dance to a mysterious tune, intoned in the distance by an invisible piper.

Albert Einstein

Today is Earth Day. Here at St. James we are celebrating both Earth Month and the Easter Season of the Resurrection. There is an easy correlation between the natural cycle of life, death and new life on earth and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. The first reading and the psalm express this natural connection, as do the thoughts above from the Hindu Mahatma Gandhi and the scientist Albert Einstein.

It becomes way more complex when we attempt to connect today's Easter gospel, this wonderful story of Jesus third and final resurrection appearance to his disciples, with Earth month, global warming, and our responsibility as evolved creatures for the stewardship of creation.

In fact, there are mixed messages in the Bible concerning the relationship between God, the soul force of the universe, the invisible piper, and human beings. And mixed messages concerning the relationship between human beings and God's creation.

For instance, how many know that there are two different creation stories in the Book of Genesis? In the first chapter of Genesis is the creation story that goes like this. On the sixth day, God said *let us make human beings in our image . . .; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.*

Immediately following in chapter two is the second creation story which is quite different. It goes like this. Man, Adam, was created and put into the Garden of Eden to till it. Then God created all the other creatures to be partners with Adam. However, there was still no real partner for Adam, so he was put into a deep sleep and out of his rib woman, Eve, was created to be his partner. There is nothing in this second story about 'dominion.' 'Partnership' with all creatures and all creation, including woman, was to be the model.

Throughout the centuries, the dominion model has prevailed. The partner model has been ignored. Our Book of Common Prayer, Eucharistic Prayer C, expresses the

domination model quite plainly “You made us the rulers of creation.” When we use this prayer here at St. James we discreetly change *rulers* to *stewards*. Too little. Too late.

For centuries we have figured that creation is here for our benefit. Ours for the taking. Over the years, it has not occurred to human beings that we could, in fact would and now do, change the face of the earth and the heavens through how we use, or misuse, earth’s resources.

In today’s gospel, Jesus tells the disciples that if they want to catch fish, they must put their nets out on the other side of the boat. They do, and there is such a huge catch of fish the net is too heavy to drag into the boat. This is a story about the abundance of God’s creation, and our ability to access that abundance through the risen Christ. There is no hint anywhere that there is any limit to this abundance or that we have any responsibility to preserve, to steward, to enhance that abundance.

Rulers of creation? It was clear from the beginning that as rulers of creation, we had little power. The wind and the waves never did obey us, and still don’t. We can’t even keep the frost off the fruit blossoms, or the wine grapes, or make it rain when we need it.

On the other hand those who live close to the earth, farmers and ranchers who earn their living from the earth, learned, often the hard way, that we must nurture the land for the land to be able to nurture us. As people move to the cities, this basic and vital truth has been obscured. We have been gobbling up the banquet of creation without thought of who will wash the dishes or prepare the next meal.

Now with the fact of global warming, the melting ice cap, with polar bears trapped on shrinking slabs of ice, the dirty carbon footprint that we all participate in making, there is a wake up call that we are finally beginning to paying attention to. We hope and pray that it will not be too little, too late.

We Christians are rethinking our relationship to the creation and to our Creator. “Be fruitful and multiply,” says God in the second creation story. Jesus teaches, “Consider the lilies of the field, they neither toil nor spin, and yet, Solomon in all his glory was not clothed as one of these.” The message: Be fruitful and multiply and God will provide. And yet, . . .

And yet, God does not always provide. Deep in our Christian consciousness we know that we are now the body of Christ. Created in the image of God as Jesus was and charged with the great commandment to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

There is not much in our basic theology or our biblical story that tells us that we are to love the earth in the sense of taking care of her. Nothing about justice for the creation. However, now there is clear evidence that the earth needs loving in order for God’s creation, including all creatures, to survive and thrive. Now we must look outside our scripture, or even better, look at our scripture with new eyes.

With these new eyes we see that to love God means to love God's creation. To do justice to God's creation by living in a way, every day, that honors creation and therefore shows our love for God in real and effective ways. This is the heart of Creation Theology. This is the heart of what I have to say this morning.

Earth month at St. James. Today at coffee hour we will talk about being prepared for a major disaster as individuals, families and this church community. A practical and humble acknowledgement that we are not the *rulers of creation*, and that we want to be ready for 'the big one.' Another Sunday we will talk about how we can walk our talk here at St. James to live more responsibly on mother earth. That will be called "the Greening of St. James," small and important ways we can make a difference here at our church.

On two Sundays we will show Al Gore's film "The Inconvenient Truth" in two parts. If you have seen it, please see it again. If you haven't seen it, please make it a priority. The film is full of truth and also full of hope. We can, we will, we are making a difference.

Our new Community Center at St. James will be a 'green' building.

The people of the world collectively are beginning to wake up. The Millennium Development Goals, passed by the UN at the beginning of this new century are clear and challenging. The Episcopal Church of the USA, the Diocese of California and St. James Church have embraced them. Now is the moment for each and every one of us to act upon them. There are eight goals? How many can you name?

"Consider the lilies of the field" We must take care of them so that they will continue to be clothed in splendor, the glory of God's creation.

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