

## Easter 6

April 27, 2008



*“O God, we thank you for this earth, our home, for the wide sky and the blessed sun, for the ocean and streams, for the towering hills and the whispering wind, for the trees and green grass. We thank you for our senses by which we hear the songs of birds, and see the splendor of fields of golden wheat, and taste autumn’s fruit, and rejoice in the feel of snow, and smell the breath of spring flowers. Grant us a heart opened wide to all this beauty; and save us from being so blind that we pass unseeing when even the common thorn bush is aflame with your glory.”* Prayer for Earth Day

These few days in spring, before Ascension Thursday called Rogation-tide harken back to agrarian days in medieval England when folks would walk around the boundaries of rural parishes, asking God’s blessing on the crops just planted. The remnant of Rogation-tide is a small note in the Prayer Book, representing a world view that acknowledged that though we do our part in the process, the sun and gentle rains – gifts from God – play the largest part in the bounty of the harvest.

Today, while we have ways to help in even those areas, and few of us are farmers, food needs and costs are in the news – and we do well to remember that the place where we live is, as one of our prayers puts it: this fragile earth, our island home. It has been placed, at least partly, in our care. We have inherited it for a time from those who lived before us. What they did well benefits us. What they did that caused damage to the earth that is ours today as well. The same is true for what we do today and tomorrow.

Earth Day was celebrated this past week and though we have usually forgotten about Rogation-tide, it has been around to remind us of our dependence upon God, and of the role of steward of the earth that is ours.

A few weeks ago in our Tuesday men's Bible study we were discussing a commentary that mentioned self-interest as a negative for the follower of Jesus. However, as we talked about it, we wondered how possible it is for us to survive as a people without a certain amount of self-interest. We thought that there is a real difference between self-interest and selfishness. I think we can even say that having an unselfish attitude to life, actually is in our self-interest.

When Jesus tells us today that he wants us to follow his commandment which is to love one another, I believe he is trying to us about the way the world will really work the way God intends. When we truly care for each other, when we care for our planet, we all benefit. An unselfish attitude toward other people and our planet is really in everyone's self interest.

So the Rogation prayers for fruitful seasons that God will "give and preserve to our use the harvests of land of the seas;" in the prayer for commerce and industry, "make those who carry on the industries and commerce of this land responsive to your will, and give us a pride in what we do, and a just return for our labor;" and in the third prayer, for stewardship of creation: "that we may be faithful stewards of your good gifts."

There is a story about an old blues singer from Mississippi named Jimmy Reed. It is said that if you listen to his recordings of strong harmonica and guitar and singing, you can hear something faintly in the background. Listen

carefully and you will hear the soft sound of a woman's voice murmuring in advance the words of the song. The story goes that Jimmy Reed was so absorbed in the blues beat of his music that he simply could not remember the words of his own songs. He needed help with the lyrics, and the woman's voice on the recordings was that of his wife coaching her husband through the recording session by whispering the words into his ear as he sang.

Whether this story is accurate, the great preacher Tom Long says that Christians might find a parallel experience. Jesus today tells his followers that the role of the Holy Spirit is, in effect to whisper the lyrics of the gospel song in the ears of the faithful.

When Jesus was present with his disciples he was himself the one who taught them, coached them in the way of life he had come to share. Now as we make our way through the great 50 days of Easter, we are coming close to the time he will leave this earth. He tells them in John 14 that the coaching will be handed over to the one he calls the Advocate, or the Comforter. He also calls this advocate: The Spirit of Truth. The Spirit whispers the lyrics in our ears.

The reason we need the Holy Spirit murmuring the Gospel in our ears, is because we are notoriously forgetful. One commentator says that we are amnesiacs who cannot keep our calling clearly in mind. Like the great Jimmy Reed, we get so caught up in the rhythm, but we forget the lyrics. We know that we are created to love and serve one another, but the pressure builds and the temptation to think mainly of ourselves, our real self-interest gives way to selfishness, we are tempted

to hold on to hurts, finding it difficult to forgive, to seek revenge ...or any number of other ways of living that are not the way of Jesus. We forget who we are and what we are meant to do and be in life.

One way to describe sin, one person wrote, is “willful forgetfulness.” We choose amnesia. We decide, as an act of our will, not to remember that we are God’s very own sons and daughters. “Willful forgetfulness.”

When we make decisions that impact the earth ... we need to have a bit more self-interest in the quality of life throughout planet earth. ...

Look at this place; we can almost hear God say in the Genesis story of creation.

“This is good. This is very good.”

Holy Spirit ... whisper the lyrics in our ears. Amen.