

This Earth, Our Home

Season of Creation 1
Planet Earth
September 8-9, 2018
Genesis 1:1-25

September summons summer's conclusion. I can surely see this in my yard. Many of my hostas have had it. They're faded and brown, tired and drooping; their season is past. But, on the other hand, my kale has kept up! It is hardy, leafy and deep green. Over the years my kale recipe repertoire has grown too. Really, white bean and kale soup is good!

The backyard birdhouses seem much quieter these days; there are many; we should charge an association fee! Earlier in the summer, the parent birds worked tirelessly back and forth to keep those little beaks filled. But now the babies have left the nest and are on their own, or at least they're away at school.

On the other hand, the bees are buzzing and busy. They love my pink turtlehead flowers. Which is fine. They also love the raspberries. Which is fine, except I do, too. I politely push the bees out of the way. There are enough berries to share.

The Season of Creation is a season within a season. Celebrating the Season of Creation is optional, and congregations can choose to celebrate it. The seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, and Lent follow the life of Jesus. The long season of Pentecost follows the life of the Spirit. *In the church year there was really no focus on God the Creator.* The focus has been on relationship between God and humanity, and humanity with God. Not so much with the created world around us. The Season of Creation's emphasis on God the Creator originated in Australia almost twenty years ago. [1] It challenges us to return to our biblical and theological traditions, to rediscover our close connection with the Creator, Christ, and the Spirit in creation. So, we return to see ourselves again as part of the very Earth from which we are made! [2]

Our series in this "Year B" is called "*WORD.*"

Our story from Genesis 1 is not a science lesson, but lovely liturgy, a poem of faith written long ago by people who lived in exile. People who longed for home and for the world to be reliable sang this song. And so, many, many centuries later so can we.

The Creation story in Genesis 1 repurposes other, older material: creation stories and cosmologies from Egypt and Mesopotamia. The text serves a new purpose, to affirm the covenant experience of the people.

It was written in the sixth century BCE for the exiles. Even though the people were experiencing emptiness and chaos, living far from home, Yahweh was still God and Yahweh was God of all life. Their God would bring life to well-being, *shalom*.

The poem affirms the character of God: God can be trusted, even against current circumstances. What you look for, you will find!

As Walter Brueggemann reminds us, it is important to hear this text as GOSPEL. [3] Creation faith is the church's confession that all of life is characterized by graciousness. Well-being is a gift. In the ancient song God creates *from nothing* and God creates *from chaos*. And both are good news because we experience emptiness, and we encounter chaos in a myriad of ways.

Genesis tells us the Earth is co-Creator with God. God calls upon to Earth to bring forth life: flower, plants and trees. And God calls on the Earth to bring forth animals, lions, tigers, bears . . . and birds and bees!

Earth is a mother from whom life emerges.

On Planet Earth weekend we give thanks for gift Earth, for being Earth beings, Earthlings. We have this in common.

The Earth, our home, is the third planet from the sun and the largest of the terrestrial planets. The Earth was formed approximately 4.54 billion years ago and is the only planet known to support life.

I was reminded of a few things when reading more about the Earth: If you feel like you're spinning slower, you are right! The Earth's rotation is gradually slowing. But not to worry; this is so slow that it could be as much as 140 million years before a day is 25 hours.

The moon is the largest satellite of any planet in our solar system. And the Earth is the densest of the planets. And I didn't realize that it is the only planet in our solar system not to be named after a Greek or Roman deity.

And we know that the Earth was once believed to be the center of the universe! Long ago, when Aristarchus (310-230 BCE) dared to say that the Earth is not at the center of the universe, people demanded that he be put on trial. Centuries later, in 1633, Galileo was tried for heresy by the Roman Inquisition, which forced him to recant his views and live under house arrest.

In 2000 Pope John Paul II issued a formal apology. And people today think that they have waited a long time for an apology!

George Bernard Shaw wrote, "All great truths begin as blasphemies."

In Galileo's day the church declared that what he discovered was against the teachings of the Bible. No matter when we live, change is hard. Nowadays we have the debate over climate change. Ignoring scientists could put our planet and people in peril.

How do we care for the Earth? As individuals, as households, communities, and as a nation?

This is a huge question.

Last week I read an editorial by Georgie Ann Geyer. (I read what she writes any chance I get.) She is an 83-year-old, foreign journalist from Chicago who has interviewed leaders from around the globe many times and speaks five languages. The headline of her column was, “*Climate is new driver of global conflict.*” [4]

Old borders are no longer the true lines dividing or destroying peoples. The new threats do not adhere to lines drawn by statesmen in London or Paris. Think of Africa, source of many of the waves of despairing migrants flooding Europe. Why? In great part because the world's largest and hottest desert—the Sahara—is rapidly advancing south, turning formerly green vegetation dry and making it impossible for farmers to live there.

In Iraq, besides fourteen years of war, there is what some scientists call “an existential threat.” The Tigris River and the 1,700-mile-long Euphrates are being diverted by Syrian and Iranian dams and poisoned by policies.

In her editorial, Geyer quotes a scientist who wrote in the *Smithsonian Magazine*: “If there is a new frontier in political science it’s the realization that environmental problems, particularly water shortages, not only worsen conflict but may actually cause it.” [5]

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that, since 2008, 22.5 million people have been violently uprooted by climate-related or extreme weather events and are searching for new homes around the globe, from Darfur, to Bangladesh, to Puerto Rico, to Gambia, to Ethiopia. For starters!

Geyer goes on to say that we need leadership and institutions that will study these developments. “And, above all, we will need the attention and the anger of the American people. Without them, all the efforts will simply be scratching an increasingly dangerous surface. [6]

Most of us are not in the same kind of predicament as millions of other people. For the most part, we control our living environment. We have heating and air conditioning, roofs over our heads, and lots of good, fresh food to eat. We have the luxury of being able to say, “What a beautiful day!,” of enjoying birds and bees in the yard, eating tomatoes and berries as soon as we pick them. We, as Earth beings, enjoy well-being.

But the Earth is still ours to care for, and millions our fellow Earthlings are not so fortunate. The old liturgy of Genesis invites us to give thanks and praise and to participate, to join mother Earth and the Creator in bringing forth well-being for everyone.

At the end of our worship on Sunday morning, before we release butterflies on this chilly day (we will see if they want to wake up!), you will receive a devotional called “Stewardship of Creation: A Thirty-Day Discipline.” [7] We printed one for each household. You are invited to use this throughout the Season of Creation and beyond! Each day there is a scripture reading, a quote from the ELCA social statement, “Caring for Creation,” a fact, a commitment—immediate and long term—and a daily prayer. One page each day.

Change is hard! We cannot be like the church years ago who silenced the scientists. Change comes slowly and starts with open mindedness and education and frankly - trust!

The writers of Genesis 1, and the people for whom they wrote, did not have to worry about plastic in the ocean, Styrofoam cups that stay around forever, melting ice caps, and expanding deserts. But they did experience emptiness, being far from home. They knew chaos and uncertainty. They longed to feel that life and the world and God were all reliable. The ancient song sings of goodness, of God’s summons for well-being. As people of faith, who trust and cling to the power of Abundant LOVE, we listen to and lean on these WORDS of promise and hope.

Well-being is a gift meant to be received, cared for, and shared.

We step into the Season of Creation with gratitude. We give thanks for the season of our lives, for flourishing in a variety of ways; for busy nests, raising young ones; for the times when we are busy bees, moving from flower to flower, with hardly a break.

And we give thanks for empty nests, and less hectic days, for the abundance of goodness that comes to us later.

The good news of our story from Genesis is the first WORD in ongoing dialogue throughout history. It is the ground from which other Good News is possible.

It is Rally Day weekend. A new school year is beginning and life will be buzzing on this corner.

Cubs manager Joe Maddon said, “September brings its own energy”

I would say this is true for more than baseball.

Amen.

Resources:

[1] *Seasons of the Spirit*, September 2, 2018.

[2] Habel, Norman C., and editors David Rhoads and H. Paul Santmire, *The Season of Creation: A Preaching Commentary*, Fortress Press, 2011, p. 3.

[3] Brueggemann, Walter. *Genesis: Interpretation: A Bible commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

[4] Geyer, Georgie Anne, "Climate is new driver of global conflict." *The Daily Herald*, September 6, 2018.

[5] Geyer, "Climate."

[6] Geyer, "Climate."

[7] Olson, Sara and Brooke Peterson. "Stewardship of Creation: A Thirty-Day Discipline." Created and produced for the [Web of Creation](#) at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

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REFLECTIONS:

- *What kind of energy do you have this September?*
- *How does the rhythm of the seasons connect you to the goodness and marvel of creation?*
- *Where can you feel the presence of the Creator in this in-between time?*
- *For what do you give thanks in this season of your life?*