

Creation III Sky Year B: 29 / 30 September 2018  
St. James Episcopal Church, Clinton NY  
The Rev. Gary Cyr

**“Take only what you need and leave the land as you found it.”  
– Arapaho Nation**

Jeremiah 4: 23-28

Psalm 19: 1-6

Mark 15: 33-39

1982– Poem X by Wendell Berry

*“There is repentance. After all, Jesus did say from the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” Except we do know that we are dishonoring creation. That we are polluting the air, the water, the land itself.”*

One of several fond memories I have of Northern Maine, is a camping trip I was on in the early 1980s with the Church Youth Group. Camping along the shore of Eagle Lake in late summer, I recall one morning waking before the others and stepping outside the tent into a fog-filled predawn grey and hearing the wail of a pair of loons – a sound that is both haunting and beautiful at the same time – seemingly calling out to each other: “Where are you?” to which the reply came: “I am here!” There was something sacred about that moment standing alone in the chilly gray morning as light slowly began to fill the sky and hearing the forlorn call of those loons. In that moment, surrounded by the forest, standing on leaves and detritus, feeling one with my surroundings and sharing it all with these creatures of the air, I felt I was experiencing a moment Kairos– a moment of God-time rather than simple chronological time. That physical place was no Church, Temple, or Synagogue yet it contained such holiness. Wendell Berry’s poem X captures in word the essence of this memory for me. Words that remind us of our connection to nature and an ordering of life that is sacred and holy. Something humankind has greatly disturbed over the centuries.

The First Nations people of these lands were good and faithful stewards of their natural surroundings. They embraced a concept of gratitude for all life and recognized that the Great Spirit provided the land and its bounty for them. They revered the land and animals and

acknowledged the interconnection between elements of land, water, air and all creatures. It's no coincidence that the Great Spirit is often depicted as an eagle. A majestic bird of the air that surveys its domain from far above the ground. The westerners (European settlers) that colonized the land, claiming it in the name of God, saw only opportunity for conquest and ownership, declaring it was God's blessing to them and then set about domesticating and taming the land, the wilderness, and the indigenous people who called it their sacred home. The legacy of that reasoning echoes down through the ages right into our current reality. Profit and ownership at the expense of all else rules our hearts and minds. Yet, Jesus calls us to a way of being that rebuffs this notion of "ownership" by calling attention to how we have forsaken the blessing God has bestowed upon creation.

The prophetic voice lingers even today, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "repent"; and the earth and all its inhabitants – creatures of air, water, and land – mourn the destruction of all that is sacred. And for what? Wealth? Power? Control? Is it for our own comfort? And if so, at what expense?

Creation Season is a time for deep reflection and repentance. Some will disagree with its message and stay away from worship on account of it. Others relish the message and willingly embrace it. Still others will remain indifferent saying: I do my part, what more can I do? I have to live too! Being a Follower-of-the-Way, a disciple of Jesus means taking up the challenge – the cross, if you will – of seeking justice, not only for humankind, but for all creation. It calls for a recognition that all manner of things is a blessing from God, especially the land, water, and air as well as all living creatures. Like all that is, we too, are created, creaturely to put it another way, and dependent upon God as the source of life itself. A life that is sacred, and as such needs to be honored and cherished for what it gives to us rather than as a possession we take and call our own.

Native American Tecumseh of the Shawnee Nation writes, "No tribe has the right to sell, even to each other, much less to strangers . . . Sell a country! Why not sell the air, the great sea, as well as the earth? Didn't the Great Spirit make them all for the use of his children?" In Christian parlance, the Creator fashioned all that is for the use of all, especially those who bear

the Creator's image. We embody that image of creative joy and care-giving, yet we live in ways that dishonor and discredit this blessing.

Transnational corporations are acquiring mineral rights and fresh water supplies in an effort to find new sources of revenue while arguing that fresh water is **not** a human right. Developers in major cities are purchasing "air space" to guarantee the view for their tenants, something I experienced with the church I attended while I lived in Toronto, Ontario. We disrupt migratory patterns through the construction of these super structures and their "view" as well as filling in marshes and wetlands for housing developments. And don't forget those fresh water supplies and aquifers. The air we breathe and the water we drink are now commodities we package and commercialize while simultaneously polluting. What a strange new world we live in. One, I dare say, that falls short of God's blessings and intention.

But there is hope. There is repentance. After all, Jesus did say from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." Except we do know that we are dishonoring creation. That we are polluting the air, the water, the land itself. We are consumers and are told through slick commercials that we need more and more "stuff" to achieve the ideal quality of life as determined by transnational corporations. Hope lies in a Gospel understanding of living communally with each other and all creation.

Living communally is part and parcel of monastic communities found in every faith tradition all over the world. It is the ethos of the Native Americans who were stewards of the land and all its creatures for centuries. The idea that we hold things in common for all rather than individually is the essence of this form of living. Rather than private ownership of land, the commercialization of natural resources, and the commodification of animals for consumption, we can take a more faith-filled approach that is attentive to our practices such that we honor the blessings of our Creator, never taking for granted the life we take so we are fed, clothed, and housed. The way of Christ is to live with a deep sense of gratitude and graciousness; to live with prayerful thanksgiving for all that we are dependent on for our survival. We are invited through the gospel and prophets, both past and present, to live by utilizing only what we need and ensuring that what remains will flourish for another generation. Or as the Iroquios Nation's constitution says (paraphrasing) living is to think seven

generations ahead and act in ways that benefit, not sacrifice, future generations, specifically the seventh generation after us. Indeed, the gospel and caring for creation do go hand-in-hand as does living from a deep sense of gratitude and thanksgiving.

Recalling that moment nearly 30+ years ago, standing in the predawn hours of Northern Maine, and listening to the forlorn wailing of those Loons, I am disposed to hear the voice of the Sacred calling me to deeper awareness and appreciation; calling bfor a richer understanding of my interconnectivity with creation. It was and is a clarion call to a transformed life in Christ. May our lives reflect our faith; may our actions reflect our values; and may we live communally such that we honor creation and thus our Creator.