

2018 04 22 – Holy Ground

Psalm 23 & 1 John 3:16-24

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul. – NRSV

It is clear that at some time in his life the author of the 23rd Psalm was hurting, he was in emotional and spiritual pain, his soul needed restoration. So God made him lie down in a pasture, God led him to the shore of a placid lake and it was in that way that God restored his soul.

Does this make sense to you? When you need to have your soul restored, where do you go? What do you do to be spiritually refreshed, re-energized, or even reborn? (*wait for answers – prayer, meditation, worship, singing, walking/hiking, canoeing, fishing*) I'm sure we all have multiple answers to that question. Sometimes I go and sit in an empty sanctuary and watch the afternoon light flow through the stained-glass windows. Sometimes I sit in a comfy chair and just take the time to notice my breath. But often I go outside. I go out into creation and hike in the coulees along the Saskatchewan River or explore the prairie landscape of Grasslands Park or spend time in the pine forest of the Cypress Hills.

Why is that? What is it about nature that makes us feel better? What is it about creation that heals our bodies, our hearts and our souls? We seem instinctively to know that we need to spend time outdoors. Some of us even have special places that we go to, sacred places where we feel closer to God. But why?

I believe that we are restored by creation because creation itself is sacred; this planet, this solar system, the universe, is holy. Cynthia Bourgeault, an American theologian, writes our “universe is not simply an ‘object’ created by a wholly other God out of the effluence of [God’s] love but it is that love itself, made manifest in the only possible way it can, in the dimensions of energy and form.”

<https://cac.org/the-universe-is-love-2018-02-22/> Our universe is love made manifest as energy and form. Wow... that means that when we lie down on the prairie, or walk in a coulee, or swim in a lake or eve plow a filed, we are connecting directly to God, to the Holy Mystery that is the essence of love. No wonder spending time in the natural world restores our souls.

Of course, we know that creation isn’t finished. Even as we speak, Darwin’s Theory of Evolution continues to be true. Our universe is being re-created in every moment and we, as human beings, are a part of that re-creation. We weren’t there when our universe was formed, but we are part of what is happening in this moment.

Our scientists tell us that, so far, the part we have played in re-creation has been mostly destructive. That our burning of fossil fuels, razing of the forests and polluting of the oceans has already created global warming and eliminated thousands of species of plants and animals and fish. We are literally destroying the very planet on which we live, the planet that provides us with the necessities of life: shelter, food and water, the planet that feeds not only our bodies, but our souls too.

So what are we to do? Well according to Thomas Berry, theologian and earth scholar, “the future can exist only when we understand the universe as composed of subjects to be communed with, not as objects to be exploited.”

<https://cac.org/the-universe-is-love-2018-02-22/> When we are in the process of restoring our souls it is easy to understand the concept of “communing” with creation and to understand that creation is made up of an energy that is love, the very essence of the sacred. But at other times in our lives it’s easy to forget. It’s easy to forget that the birds, the animals and the fish, the forests, the prairies and the deserts are all sacred subjects of creation. It’s easy to forget that we are one of them. It’s easy to forget that we, like all the rest of the universe, are created of love and meant for love.

In today’s scripture reading from the first letter of John the author said, “My children, our love must not be simply words or mere talk – it must be true love, which shows itself in action and truth.” In order to save our planet , in order to show our love for our neighbour and for our world, we are all being called to change how we live and act in creation.

Today is Earth Day, a day set aside to focus on caring for our planet. In today’s bulletin I have included some information from the Earth Day Canada website. Earth Day Canada is a national charity that inspires and supports people across our country to connect with nature. The members of this organization believe that when we connect with our natural environment we also build a strong commitment to stewardship and conservation. In other words, when we love our planet we will also care for our planet.

This year's Earth Day campaign has two main themes. The first one is "Consume Less." In particular, in 2018 our focus is on plastic pollution and its threat to human and animal health. You may have noticed that plastic has been in the news a lot lately. This week Britain announced plans to ban the use of plastic straws. CBC News followed that announcement with a story that said "bans may not be feasible for most of the plastics in our lives, so broader changes to the way we produce, consume and dispose of plastics are needed to make a real difference." <http://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/banning-plastic-straws-1.4628160> This means that our approach to plastic pollution needs to be two-pronged: while working to reduce our own consumption, we also need to be encouraging our governments and our corporations to make broader, systemic changes, changes that will make plastic products easier to re-use, recycle or decompose.

Reducing consumption is key, but I believe that the second theme in this year's Earth Day campaign is even more important. That theme is called "Play More." Through their "Play More" campaign Earth Day Canada is encouraging children and adults to spend more time in the outdoors. They are providing suggestions for creative outdoor activities for children of all ages. This theme brings us back to the 23rd Psalm and the importance of connecting with creation. When we connect with nature, we are connecting with the sacred, with the source of all love, with God. It is by connecting with creation that we are able to restore our souls. So now that spring has arrived in Swift Current may we all take the time to reconnect with our wonderful world.