

A communion meditation delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Pentecost 17, September 6, 2009, dedicated with grateful thanksgiving for the men, women and children who labor in this world with too little pay and too little thanks, and always to the glory of God!

“Blessings and Benedictions for the Earth”

***(Part III of III in the sermon series
“Earth Prayers”)***

Today, I come to the end of this short sermon series entitled, “Earth Prayers.” I have attempted to bring creation stories, prayers for Mother Earth and today, blessings and benedictions. My source of inspiration has primarily been *Earth and All the Stars* by Dr. Anne Rowthorn. Anne was here in 2006 with her husband, Bishop Jeffery Rowthorn, our Gladden lecturer. Anne is an accomplished author of six books and a professor at Hartford Theological Seminary, and a friend. I encourage you to read one of her six books. This one would be a great choice.

+++++

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

+++++

It is entitled *The Story of Three Young Men*. Found in the Apocryphal literature of the Bible, it is the final song of three young Jewish captives in Babylon as they go to their fiery death for refusing to worship a golden image instead of God. At the moment of their death, the three young men sing out their song that is an exhortation

to all living creatures. It is a song of praise to God, the creator of all. This song of praise is the most comprehensive song to God and creation in all of scripture. Listen to this hymn of praise sung at the moment of death by three young Jewish men more than 2,500 years ago:

*Glorify God, all you works of creation,
Praise and highly exalt the Holy One forever.
In the firmament of God's power, glorify the Holy One,
praise and highly exalt God for ever.*

*Glorify God, you angels and all powers of creation,
O heavens all waters above the heavens,
Sun and moon and stars of the sky, glorify the Holy One,
praise and highly exalt God for ever.
Glorify God every shower of rain and fall of dew,
all winds and fire and heat.
Winter and summer, glorify the Creator,
praise and highly exalt God for ever.
Glorify God, O chill and cold,
drops of dew and flakes of snow.
Frost and cold, ice and sleet, glorify the Creator . . .
Glorify God, O nights and days,
O shining light and enfolding dark.
Storm clouds and thunderbolts, glorify the Creator,
praise and highly exalt God for ever.*

(Found in *Earth and All the Stars*, edited by Anne Rowthorn, Resource Publications, Eugene, Oregon, 2003, pp.269-271)

The hymn of praise continues lifting up the mountains and hills, springs of water, seas, streams, whales, all birds, flocks and herds. Finally, the song writers call upon every person to offer everything that is within them – all their spirit and their souls of righteousness, all their humility of heart and holiness of faith – in the praise of God's creation. The three young men call all of us to offer everything that is

in us to glorify our creator, to praise and highly exalt God forever. The one who created, redeemed and sustains the entire universe deserves all our love, praise and admiration.

Today, 2,500 years after this praise to God was written, it still sings of the immensity of God's universe and our call to glorify and praise God's Holy name. In the end, these three young men pointed to the true origin of creation and our praise. It is God. It is God who is all deserving and present in all and through all. It is God whose works in all creation cause us to exalt and praise God forever.

In the end, we often find our beginning. Whether it is the end of life, the sunset at the end of day or a farewell to a loved one, the end is our beginning. T.S. Eliot wrote in *Four Quartets*, "What we call the beginning is often the end and to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from." (Ibid., p.313)

It is my prayer that we discover and respond to our deep love of God's earth and creation before it is too late. In *Humanity and Ecology*, the Dali Lama writes that the earth is our precious home and needs all of our efforts to protect and save it. He says, "*Ultimately, the decision to save the environment comes from the human heart. The key point is to call for a sense of universal responsibility that is based on love, compassion, and clear awareness.*" (Ibid., p. 299)

The protection of our earth home begins at home and in our church home.

The Union of Concerned Scientists ranks home heating, hot water, air conditioning and household appliances and lighting as the next most harmful consumer activities after transportation and food consumption. We need to turn off our lights and household appliances, turn down our hot water, turn off our AC and unplug our appliances which drain energy when not in use. The list of things we can do is long and simple as we care for the planet.

It is my prayer today that each of us makes a commitment to love

the earth and all creatures great and small – to consume less and care more; to pluck-up less and plant more; to take less and give more.

I leave you with this benediction written by an unknown author of Celtic origin. The Celtic people had their origins around the Black Sea in 1000 B.C. and then traveled to central Europe and the Pyrenes in 600 B.C. and finally westward to Ireland and the Scottish Isles in the early part of the Common Era. In 400 A.D., they brought Christianity to Ireland and Scotland, combining their reverence for the earth and all creation with a deep and abiding love of Christ. This blessing is entitled *The Blessing of Light*:

*May the blessing of light be on you,
light without and light within.*

*May the blessed sunlight shine upon you
and warm your heart
till it glows like a great fire
and strangers may warm themselves
as well as friends.*

*And may light shine out of the eyes of you,
like a candle set
in the window of a house,
bidding the wanderer to come in
out of the storm.*

*May the blessing of rain be on you,
to beat upon your spirit
and wash it fair and clean;
and leave there many a shining pool
where the blue of heavens shine,
and sometimes a star.
May the blessing of the earth be upon you,
the great round earth.*

*May you ever have a kindly greeting for people
as you're going along the roads.*

*And now may God bless you,
and bless you kindly. Amen.*

+++++

*A Benediction from the World Council of Churches, Nairobi Assembly,
1975:*

*As the earth keeps turning, hurtling through space;
and night falls and day breaks from land to land';
Let us remember people - waking, sleeping, being born and dying -
of one world and of one humanity. Let us go from here in peace.*