

“The Eighth Day of Creation”

Deuteronomy 30:15-20; I Corinthians 13:1-7, 13; Luke 14:25-33

Part six of the sermon series,

“God’s Good Earth”

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From the Pulpit

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A communion meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Senior Minister, The First Congregational United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 18, September 4, 2022, dedicated to Baxter, our cat of 20 years who died during the first service of worship on 9/4/22, and who faithfully sat by side for 20 years each morning for prayer, for writing, for coffee, for purring, for presence, for love, to Porter and all God’s creation who overcome so much to teach us all how to live and love, to Susan and Kelly, and always to the Glory of God!

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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.

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Some of God’s creatures are comfortable in their own skin. No matter what they have faced, no matter where they have come from, they find a way to shine God’s light in this world. Porter was one of those creatures. In her book, *Porter: A Wolfdog and his People*, Anne Eston, daughter of our beloved Janet Younger of blessed memory, tells the story of this amazing wolfdog.

In the words of Porter’s rescuer and owner Susan Vogt, *“Porter’s story has so many elements and layers...it is one of overcoming anxiety and*

fear (he was a 120-pounds of abused and unsocialized wolfdog, afraid of us, untrusting of us and protective of himself when he came to our family), it is one of transforming fear into understanding and anxiety into love, which is really a great (lesson) for life in general; it is one of jumping right in to do what's right regardless of how it will end up; it is one of both Porter and me overcoming obstacles...never giving up one each other...But the greatest story of all, and Porter's real purpose, lies in people, all the people we met and who have become important to us because of Porter" (Anne Eston, *Porter: A Wolfdog and His People*, published by Anne Eston, 2019, pp.1-2).

Following Susan's Forward, Anne Eston opens her book with this quote from Charles Dickens, *"one always begins to forgive a place as soon as it's left behind."* When Porter is discovered, at six-years old, he is chained with a heavy 30-foot chain in someone's backyard here in rural Ohio. He is a terrifying sight. He is frightening, neglected, abused, and so weak that the doctor who is brought to assess him, is torn between rescue and "putting him down." He takes a chance as he looks into Porter's eyes and he sees something there. He takes a chance that someone will step forward – and that someone steps forward in the person of Susan and her husband, Collin. They nurture and care for Porter – not a simple task for a severely neglected wolfdog. The book tells their story.

In the end, Porter teaches them about living and surviving. As Susan said, *"he brings them into a whole new world of care for God's creation."*

What is it you and I need to enter a whole new world of care for God's creation? What do we expect as we inhabit this celestial ball? I ask this from the depth of my heart. What is it we need?

Certainly, we need creation to feed us, to sustain us, and allow us to have life and breath. But beyond these primal needs, what else is

there? What do we expect from nature all around us, from the lakes and streams, from the oceans and waterways; from the sky and the land; from all creatures great and small.

I feel as though God's good earth has been taking care of us – all along. Although the story of Genesis calls us to inhabit this earth and it charges US to take care of all the earth as good stewards, it seems as though the opposite has actually been happening since the creation of humanity. It seems as though we arrived on the earth and the earth has been taking care of us – ever since – as a species. We have expected so much from the Earth. We have taken so much from the Earth. And how have we returned thanks by giving back? How have we been stewards of our planet home? I don't mean this as a theoretical, philosophical or theological question. That's not what I am talking about. I literally mean, what have we done? What has each of us returned in thanks for the opportunity to occupy this spinning jewel we call home?

I want you to really think about this. What trees have you planted and nurtured? What plants have you cared for and given a home? What natural setting have you saved? What species have you helped save from extinction? What animal have you provided a home for or which little neighbor that has come to your property have you allowed to have a habitat there? What have you done to help our earth as our home?

I want us to think of today, as the early Christians did. I want us to see today and every Sunday as The Eighth Day of Creation. In the Epistle of Barnabas, published around 80 AD, the early apostle, mentioned in the fourth chapter of Acts writes these words, *"The Sabbath which I have made, in which I have set all things to rest is the eighth*

day, which is the beginning of a whole new world. Wherefore also, we keep the eighth day for rejoicing, in which Jesus also rose from the dead, and having been manifested, ascended into heaven” (Barnabas 15:8-9).

In 160 AD, Justin Martyr wrote of the eighth day, that the water of baptism connects us to the water of this world, that the wood of cross connects us to all trees and the mystery of all creation, and ascension of Christ into heaven connects us to heaven and the skies above. The mystery of water, earth and sky – all connected by this Day of Resurrection. With our connection made on this day of resurrection, we are called to protect and defend the water, the earth and the skies – because all of this comes from God and is gloriously made manifest in our Resurrected Savior.

For each of us as Christians, let us begin today to claim today and each Sunday as The Eighth Day of Creation. It is truly the Day of Resurrection, the Day of New Beginnings, the Day in which we and all Creation begin again. Today and each Sunday, let us remember creation, reconnect to creation and restore creation. – that each of the eighth days of creation – for us – that we begin again to connect to creation – if we have lost track of our connections. We are called to reconnect to God’s good earth.

In our Sanctuary, a stained-glass window portraying the Eighth Day of Creation looks down upon us from the clerestory windows high above us. It is a reminder of our need to connect to new beginnings and new hope. As we sit beneath it each Sunday it silently beckons us to care for God’s good earth on our Eighth Day of Creation. The Eighth Day of Creation is the one that we are given to live into – to protect the other seven days and nurture the other seven days – to keep them at the center of our hope.

I was thinking of a story I wanted to share as we come to the close of this series. It comes from Harvard professor of psychology, Robert Coles, and is recorded in his book, *The Spirituality of Children*. During his research, Coles spent time with children on a Native American reservation in the west. He kept trying to ask the children questions about God and their relationship to God. He would ask questions and they pleasantly and quietly sat there – with no response. Finally, on one of his last days there, a seven-year-old girl walked to the front of the class, took his hand and led him out of their schoolhouse. She sat down on the steps and pointed at the sky. When you look up, what do you see? He said, “I see clouds. I see the sky.” She said, “we see God.” “When you look out at the grass and the animals all around us, what do you see?” He answered, “I see the grass and all the animals.” She said, “We see God.” She said, “God is in everything. God is in the mountains, the stones, the soil – everywhere all the time. All the time – God is all in all. God is everything.” This seven-year-old began to explain God to Robert Coles. How beautiful is that?

What if we believed that? What if we stepped into seeing every single thing, every single moment, every single person around us as the presence of God, it would change everything. As we step into this Eighth Day of Creation, let’s use this understanding of God as our new understanding. Let’s see the blessedness of God in everything, every person, every creature, every breath of air.

As we come to God’s table of grace, set with bread and grape juice, elements of God’s creation, I close this series of God’s Good Earth and each of you with this poem, written by Anne for Porter.

Chained. Waiting for food, for life, for love. Hit, chained, waiting, surviving. Three thousand sunsets. Countless clouds. Hurling toward a hard stop. One hand with a heart ended that plot. Unchained, a sniff, a nip, a breath. A walk, and back again, a run, and back again into safety, warmth, nourishment, love. Venturing out and returning home on a path apart, a circle of trust, gathering tentative greetings, one more, two more, on the way back home. Forward and double back, looking up with eyes that love and receive love, curling in, even to sit at a stranger's feet at last. A sniff, a breath. A ripple on the water, a footprint in the snow. The circle widens. (Ibid, p. 141).

I pray that yours is the “one hand that ends the plot” in connecting with God’s good earth and each of us see and know around us – the earth is crying out for healing and hope – and depending on us to hear the cries. Amen.