

FIRST LESSON: Isaiah 65:17-25
SECOND LESSON: Matthew 6:25-34
April 14, 2024

EARTH DAY SUNDAY

“We Are of the Earth”

Sermon © Lisa C. Farrell

Little boys are supposed to be made of frogs and snails and puppy dog’s tails, but as the mother of two boys I have to tell you that what they are really made of, is dirt. Ray Romano said that “Having children is like living in a frat house. Nobody sleeps, everything’s broken, and there’s a lot of throwing up.” I have to add to that, a lot of cleaning up. Parenting has been described as treading water and then being handed a few cats. But as much as I spent a lot of time scrubbing dirt off of my boys when they were growing up, the fact is, they really are made of dirt! We all are. It’s odd how detached the human race has become from the planet we live on. It’s as if nature were on one side and people on the other. But here’s the reality: The human body is made of the earth. 99% of us is oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium and phosphorus. About 0.85% is composed of another five elements: potassium, sulfur, sodium, chlorine, and magnesium. The rest of us are trace elements. We are literally made of the stuff of this planet. We might imagine ourselves to be separate, but we are in fact, **of the earth**. We are connected to our planet at a molecular level.

When Jesus spoke to us about worry he referred to creation. He said, “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. . . See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.” Jesus reminds us of our deep connection to creation. And it is in our oneness with the planet that we can find our rest.

We don’t tend to think theologically about our connection with creation but the early Church Fathers did, as did many medieval theologians. God the Father was identified as the original cause of creation, God the Son as the creative cause, and the Holy Spirit as the one who brings it all into being. Jesus is the creative cause because according to the gospel of John he is the Logos. Often translated as “word” the Logos is much more than that. Logos is a philosophical idea. It means the reason or form of something. It’s structure. God decided to create and created through Jesus. The infinite order and diversity of creation comes about through Jesus. And it is the Spirit who makes it all happen. These are ideas, of course, ideas for which we have no proof because what we are really trying to describe is that which is indescribable.

Nature is not just inert stuff we can do what we like with. Nature is alive and infused with the Spirit of God. When we spend time in nature we feel restored because of this connection. The world was created good and beautiful.

We live busy anxious lives. The natural world is also busy. Growth and change are a constant. But nature does not suffer from anxiety. Animals fear immediate danger. They don't dwell on what might or might not happen tomorrow. That is a uniquely human burden. It is not work and creativity that causes our anxiety. To be involved in creating is a good thing. It is fear of loss, of harm, of pain. It is fear of not having enough. Jesus was not speaking to the rich on this occasion, although the rich also experience anxiety. Money competes with God for our hearts, and our whole culture teaches us that whatever we have it is never enough. There is always something more and better just out of reach.

Most of us at Penn Wynne are middle class. We worry about the PECO bill and the car loan, the interest rates that keep going up and the cost of food. And those with children know the constant demands of providing for a growing family and the struggle of dealing with children who want to keep up with their peers. Yet compared to the rest of the world we are inconceivably rich. And the poor, the majority of those Jesus spoke to, literally lived hand to mouth. They worked long hard days just to scrape by. One accident or death in the family could quickly bring disaster to all. I do not blame them for worrying. But justified by circumstances or not, anxiety is crippling. My grandmother worried about everything, and now my mother is doing the same thing. Her mind *invents* things to worry about. But it was Charles Spurgeon who said, "Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but only empties today of its strength."

Worry is a side effect of fight or flight. The chemicals that rush through our bloodstream to enable us to get away quickly or take a stand and fight for our life pull attention away from everything in us not critical to actually staying alive at that moment. Things shut down. Our digestive system takes a break, and our vision literally narrows. It's a remarkably effective system. Although our mental processing can only deal with what is right in front of us at that moment, we are able to tap into great physical strength for a short period of time. But there's a problem. The same chemicals and body functions that help us in fight or flight, harm us when they become chronic. They literally age us and make us sick.

Jesus knows that letting go of worry is not easy for us. To just say, "Don't worry!" is really a waste of time. Instead, he said, "*Look at the world God has made. Look at creation. As glorious as the birds and the flowers are, are you not more valuable than they are?*" The people in this time and place were closely connected to the world around them. They didn't live in houses sealed up tight. Their answer to rodents in the house was to move a few snakes in, and if that wasn't sufficient, a cat. Animals shared their homes. They experienced nature every day. Jesus said "*Look and see, and remember you are a part of it. And as far as God is concerned, you are the most important part.* God is not distant from us. God is HERE. God loves us and God loves the world.

Not worrying does not mean not planning. It does not mean sitting back and doing nothing. We still have to go to work, make a budget, cook, clean and take care of family. We are still called to share what we have with others. And in our world today with the planet in danger because of the actions of humanity, we are all still called to action. Wringing our hands will not help. Getting microplastics out of our environment, changing our carbon footprint, switching from a way of life that is wasteful and constantly creating more waste, those things will help. Learning about the essential role of native plants and the devastation caused to our ecosystems by outside invaders, that will help. There are times that we feel helpless because we don't know where to begin, but people are already doing the work needed to help us. We can educate ourselves. The Earth Care Group of this congregation is working on providing resources, and Earth Day in the Park on April 21st is one such perfect opportunity.

Most of the time when I preach on this text I focus on just the human side of things. Today we have looked at the broader context. We are part of creation. When Jesus came into the world it was not just to save us, but to redeem creation itself. The message is direct. There is more to life than what we will eat or drink or wear. There is more to life than PECO or Wall Street. *Just don't tell them that.* There's more to life than the washing machine that just broke or the plumbing that just burst. We have to deal with it. We don't have to worry about it. Jesus wants us to be free from worry so we can take care of what is really important—bringing justice, mercy and wholeness to the world. It is a matter of priorities. Worry disables us, but trust in God enables us.

“But bad things will still happen!” we argue. Yes, they will. Jesus said that each day has its own evil or hardships. What God wants us to do is live in the present. We gain nothing by living in fear. We are called back to living one day at a time. And while we can't solve the world's climate crisis today and by ourselves, we can start where we are and change our own way of living. Amen.

Isaiah 65:17-25

17 “See, I will create

new heavens and a new earth.

The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.

18 But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I will create,

for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight
and its people a joy.

19 I will rejoice over Jerusalem
and take delight in my people;
the sound of weeping and of crying
will be heard in it no more.

20 “Never again will there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not live out his years;
the one who dies at a hundred

will be thought a mere child;
the one who fails to reach a hundred
will be considered accursed.

21 They will build houses and dwell in them;
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

22 No longer will they build houses and others live in them,
or plant and others eat.

For as the days of a tree,
so will be the days of my people;
my chosen ones will long enjoy
the work of their hands.

23 They will not labor in vain,
nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune;
for they will be a people blessed by the Lord,
they and their descendants with them.

24 Before they call I will answer;
while they are still speaking I will hear.

25 The wolf and the lamb will feed together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,
and dust will be the serpent's food.

They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,"
says the Lord.

Matthew 6:25-34

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? **26** Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?**27** Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life^{al}?"

28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. **29** Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. **30** If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? **31** So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' **32** For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **33** But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. **34** Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.