

September 29, 2019 Creation Season 4: Sinking Boats (Ocean)

Our recent headlines and newsfeeds are overtaken by the youth of today protesting for action regarding climate change. Greta Thunberg, from Sweden, is a stellar motivational speaker with conviction, passion and a call for all us, especially politicians, to step up and act for change in how we treat our climate

She recently blasted world leaders at the UN Climate summit with a powerful speech. She offers these words:

“How dare you! We’ll be watching you. This is all wrong. I shouldn’t be up here. I should be in school at the other side of the ocean, yet you come to the youth for hope. How dare you! You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words yet I am one of the lucky ones. People are suffering and people are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!

For more than 30 years the science has been crystal clear. How dare continue to look away and come here saying that you are doing enough when the politics and solutions needed are nowhere in sight. You say that you hear us and that you understand the urgency, but no matter

how sad and angry I am, I do not want to believe that because if you really understand the situation and still keep failing to act then you would be evil and that I refuse to believe.

How dare you pretend that this can be solved with just business as usual and technical solutions. In 8 ½ years there will be no solutions or plans left. You are not mature enough to tell it like it is. You are failing us but the young people are starting to understand your betrayal. The eyes of all future generations are upon you and if you choose to fail us, I saw we will never forgive you! We will not let you get away with this. Right here, right now is where we draw the line. The world is waking up and change is coming, whether you like it or not.”

Sadly, Pastor Robert Jeffress, who serves on President Trump’s Evangelical Advisory Board and the White House Faith Initiative, had words for young Greta. His words were disgraceful and applauded the fact that President Trump attended a mere 14 minutes of the summit before heading to a different event. Pastor Jeffress shockingly referred to climate change as an “imaginary crisis and that somebody needs to read poor Greta Genesis, Chapter 9, and tell her the next time she worries about global warming, just look at the rainbow. That’s God’s promise that the polar ice

caps aren't going to melt and flood the world again." And what would Greta continue to say? "How dare you!"

We need to remember that all aspects of creation are interwoven as a great tapestry of being. We also need to remember that at the heart of our United Church identity, lies a theology based on Celtic roots – a very strong connection to creation. Celtic Christianity has always understood, and still practices today, an understanding that there is no separation between the Creator and creation. That the Creator, God, is all in all; that the Creator is “the ground of all being.” Let’s spend a few minutes with that idea. Today’s climate is connected to each and every person in all corners of the earth and we need to step up and take action, remembering the Friday protests all over the world where today’s youth are demanding governments to take action, but that each of us as individuals need to make changes as well.

Think back to your earliest childhood memories of first listening to the trickling waters of a river or crashing waves of the ocean, or lying in the grass, feeling and smelling it and seeing its brilliant green, or watching sunlight dappling through leaves... Connected to these playful moments will be recollections of experiencing at the deepest of levels a type of communion with God is in nature.

As a young child, my family had a cottage, as I mentioned last week, on the water, with a small creek running beside it. I would spend hours at the edge of the creek watching the frogs and catching them, moving the rocks to create diversions, sailing my boats down and even damming it up to see what would happen. I even enjoyed listening to the babbling sounds as I drifted to sleep each night. I distinctly remember having the sense of being connected with God in the sound, the water, the croaking frogs. I didn't call it God at the time, but I knew it was the presence, the life that spawns and connects all of creation.

All things come into being through God. When we look with God's eyes what we see is that we and all of creation are interwoven as a great tapestry of being. Now, this is all lovely and touchy-feely and everything. But, so what? So what that the Creator is here as close as the breath within our lungs and the blood coursing through our veins? So what that we and all creation are interwoven as a great tapestry of being? So what? Well, I am glad you asked.....

The ancient theologian Pelagius states "...it is not what you believe that matters; it is how you respond with your heart and your actions. It is not believing in Christ that matters; it is becoming like him." There, beloved, is the challenging "So what?" as we continue with this Season of Creation.

If the Creator is in and of creation, this fragile earth, our island home; if God's spirit is in the waters of the trickling pond and the roar of the ocean's waves, how would Jesus interact with God's creation? If what truly matters in our Christianity is that we are to become like Jesus..... how do we interact with God in God's creation? Not just acknowledging God in creation - that's just the lip work - but what do we do with God's creation.

If God is not just "out there" but also right here, literally in creation, if God is indeed the "ground of all being" - when we deforest the Amazon for more cattle grazing land for our cheap hamburgers; when we inject arsenic and other poisons into the earth in our quest for cheap gasoline - if we are to become like Jesus - how would Jesus interact with, as St. Francis calls it, Brother Earth? There is the "so what" challenge.

This leads me to think of our scripture reading today, and the story of fishing, and the idea of big waters, the ocean. We need to understand the complex relationship between the earth and the ocean – as if they were twins, both swarming with living creatures of different kinds. Ocean and earth connect in their shared beginning, in their cycles of living, and in the process of aging and dying, such that their fates entangle, as one would expect of twins. Of course, what one expects from this relationship depends on one's understanding of and experience with twins – which I do

have some experience with! Twins share – sometimes inexplicably – vibes and connections. They can understand each other, and each can be the best companion, sustainer and keeper of the other, but also be each other's worst nemesis, such as Cain and Abel.

The threat that ocean poses to earth has become more frightening as a result of events such as the Boxing Day tsunami in Asia in 2004, which reached the shores of Africa; the September tsunami in Oceania in 2009, and the tsunami in 2011 that devastated Japan. We also have ocean devastation from countless hurricanes in more recent times. We have rising sea levels while ice thaws due to global warming. While being mindful of these oceanic results, let us relate to ocean with the humility and care that we owe earth, and let us extend to earth the respect that we have for ocean.

Our scripture reading today is a complex fishing story, with twists and turns taking place. Many of us like to think we have learned something of the art of fishing, whether in streams, lakes, or the sea. Without a fish finder, Simon Peter knew the “way” of the fish, their feeding habits and their normal habitats. He had fished all night, with no luck and now it was time to rest, for Sabbath, and wash the nets. However, the challenge of Jesus was for Simon to throw his nets in the deep! The deep is the realm of mystery

and wonder. The deep was the unknown. God Creator is mystery and wonder. And it is precisely in that domain that the disciples catch a mass of fish. Jesus challenges them to move beyond their comfort zones, the known world, and to explore the deep.

Jesus, it seems, is in tune with the wisdom innate in the deep of that lake and knows the “way” of the fish. Jesus challenges his disciples, however, to move beyond knowing the ways of the fish to knowing the ways of humans so that they come to understand his message of new life. There is another deep they must explore: bringing people to know the cosmic Christ, the risen one who permeates all creation.

The catch testifies to the wealth in the waters. There is deep water in the lake, where they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. They filled their boat and the boat of their partners, and both boats began to sink. That is how great the catch was, and how rich the waters were – there were enough fish to sink the boats!

The catch was great; and it appears greater because of the failure in the previous night. I am troubled by what appears to be greed on the part of the fishers. Did they have to haul all the catch onto the boat? Could they not have released some of the fish? The wealth of the waters is not endless, and failure to question actions that abuse it is irresponsible. Based

on ocean views, it is not so much the waters/ocean that we need to control, but those who abuse its resources. The sinking boats are evidence of this abuse, especially since the text states that they dropped everything and followed Jesus – with no mention of whether they washed the nets or donated the nets or fish to those in need.

To remember ocean is not to seek to make it static and rigid, as if it were possible to tame it, but to honour its fluidity and richness; to see the Creator in each wave and ripple, in each creature living within it, and also in the creatures consuming and using it. Ocean is not an uninhabitable wilderness, but a hive buzzing with life and mysteries. And so, you hopefully believe in God, but maybe you can reach out of your comfort zone, cast nets into the mysterious deep, and believe in a Creator that dwells in all aspects of the environment. Then you have to discern how you will live “with respect in creation”. Remember, “...it is not what you believe that matters; it is how you respond with your heart and your actions.” And as Greta Thunberg exclaims: “How dare you not take action! We’ll be watching you.”

Amen.