

Creation Season – Intro Sunday September 6, 2020

Today marks the first Sunday in our Creation Season. Why a Season of Creation? First, because God is first and foremost the Creator of all life. Second, because we were created with the rest of nature. Third, because God has given us a creation to celebrate with! Fourth, because through worship we have an opportunity to come to terms with current ecological crises in a spiritual way so as to empathize with a groaning creation. Fifth, because this season enables us to celebrate the many ways in which Christ is connected with creation. So, enjoy this season; be challenged by this season, from now up to and including Thanksgiving.

The Season of Creation is an optional season of the church year, introduced to the United Church of Canada a few years ago, but with international recognition for some time. For the most part, the seasons of the church year follows the life of Jesus: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent and Easter. The remainder of the church year encompasses Pentecost season (or Ordinary Time), which celebrates life in the Holy Spirit. God is celebrated throughout the entire church year. And God the Creator, Christ the Redeemer of creation, and the Holy Spirit as Sustainer of life are integral to worship throughout the church year.

There is no focus in the church year on God the Creator, however, no opportunity to reflect in a concentrated way on the foundation of redemption and sanctification, namely, the very creation itself that is redeemed and sanctified. For centuries, our theology, our ethics, and our worship have been oriented in two dimensions: our relationship with God and our human relationships with one another. Now it is time to turn our attention to God's relationship with all creation and with our relationship with creation (and with God through creation).

In a special way, the Season of Creation follows the lead of the psalmists who exhorts us to celebrate together *with* creation – with the forests, the rivers, and the fields who praise the Creator in their own way. We celebrate Earth, the garden planet God has chosen as God's sanctuary and as our home. We celebrate with the creatures God has created as our kin on this blue-green planet. As we celebrate, we are conscious of the crisis that creation faces because of human greed, exploitation, and neglect. As we celebrate, we empathize with those parts of creation – human and nonhuman – that are groaning because of human crimes against creation. And, especially, we celebrate the Christ, whose death serves as a reminder of forgiveness, grace, and love, and whose risen presence is the cosmic power at work in reconciling and restoring creation.

This year we will reflect on our relationship with God through Creation with Forests, Land, Wilderness, Rivers, Humanity/Cosmos. This season challenges us to reorient our relationship with creation, with the Creator, with Christ, and with the Holy Spirit. While this challenge may have been provoked, in part, by the current ecological crisis and a growing awareness of our place in the web of life, the origins of our reorientation lie deep in our Christian tradition, both in our biblical roots and in our theological heritage. We are challenged to rediscover our intimate connections with creation, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. We return to see ourselves again as part of the very Earth from which we are made.

In the beginning we are not our wishes, hopes, dreams and plans, but God, and God's Word, and God's love toward the world that God chooses to create. The text in John reminds us that, amid life's chaos, the world belongs to God. The prologue, as the opening is called, asserts that Christ always was, as if to reveal that God's love and intention for humanity was not simply the result of human sin, but part of God's intention and love for the world from the start.

In the midst of the worries of the world, of illness, war, sickness, tragedy and doubt, Christ's light shines. In the first several months of the coronavirus pandemic, environmentalists and laypersons alike were

astonished to find that, while humanity was social distancing and sheltering in place, nature was finally taking a little time for herself. It was a positive sign that perhaps all of this fear and loss had some practical, long-lasting purpose after all. People were seeing crystal clear water in the Venice canals for the first time in generations. Those sheltering in place looked out their windows to see wild animals wandering freely through the abandoned city streets. The smog-choked skies over Delhi and Shanghai were blue and cloudless; something that even the most stringent international environmental climate agreements had trouble accomplishing.

Sustainability science researchers at Sweden's Lund University have cited a number of different explanations as to why carbon emissions have dropped so severely in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. One of the main theories is that transport makes up 23 percent of the world's global emissions, and if public health measures are keeping people from engaging in unnecessary travel, the numbers will definitely fall. The problem comes when the world starts up again. Still, some experts argue that the renewed family time and discovery of alternative means of entertainment might actually have a lasting effect on how often people travel in the future.

Businesses have learned similar lessons from the pandemic as well. Many have found that by allowing workers to telecommute, they are saving on overhead. With driving/commuting making up about 72 percent of carbon emissions, alterations to the fiscal day-to-day may result in inadvertent improvements on our severely damaged ozone.

It's hard to see it now, but the light does shine in the darkness, and the coronavirus pandemic will eventually be over, and the darkness will not consume us. Several countries are working towards a viable coronavirus vaccine and when it arrives, the world will eventually return to some degree of normalcy. But the trick to affecting positive environmental outcomes at this stage is by reinforcing positive behavioural changes within the population.

There are also very simple, personal ways to show that Creation light to others. It might be as simple as welcoming the stranger who appears in our bubble; it may mean buying a cup of coffee for a homeless person on the street; it may mean protesting an injustice at a rally.

Today's texts are ecological as well. Some read Genesis 1 as a license to take "kingly" dominion over the rest of creation. John tells us that all of life on earth is God's handiwork. In a world too often divided and ecologically fragile, John's vision starts with all things being created by and

through God. It might be helpful to think for a moment about what it would be like to live in a world where we respected God's creation of each and every living thing – plant, animal and person. Take a look outside. Go for a hike. Stroll the beach. Have these experiences not shown us the beauty of God's creation? Have we not, in the midst of that creation, felt the wonder? All creatures were made by God, according to John – even society's outcasts, along with those whose age, disability, sexual orientation, national identity, or intellectual capacity may make you see them as "less than human" or imperfect.

Our churches urge us to be Christlike. However, most days this task seems impossible in our sinful and busy lives. Many of us wonder and worry if we are being "good enough Christians". This text in John reminds us that we are not called to be Christ. We are called to be John the Baptists; whose lives testify to God's light and love in the world.

This year, the global reach of the novel coronavirus revealed our shared human nature and the inter-connectivity of our economies, political structures, health care systems, food production chains, energy and transportation systems in devastating ways. The pandemic also demonstrated that the entire web is rooted in the Earth and limited by the Earth's capacity to sustain our economic and ecological demands. The

unjust effects of climate change are a consequence of our inability to find a sustainable balance of this web.

During the Season of Creation, we unite as one family in Christ, celebrating the bonds we share with each other and “with every living creature on Earth” (Genesis 9:10) The Christian family celebrates the season by spending time in prayer, considering ways to inhabit our common home sustainably, and lifting our voices in the public sphere.

The scriptures begin with God’s affirmation that all of creation is “very good.” (Genesis 1:31) As co-creatures and caretaker of God’s creation, human beings are called to protect and nurture its goodness. (Genesis 2:15, Jeremiah 29:5-7) Our vocation to protect and nurture life relates to the sustainability of ecological, economic, social and political systems. A just balance between these aspects of life must be maintained for the health of the Earth and all creatures. We are spurred to answer this call primarily by generation Z, and many others, because it is these youth and young adults who will NOT let us forget and will make sure that the light shines in the darkness of this environmental plight, and we will prevail. We shall overcome, and offer light and hope moving forward – a light that shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.

Amen.