

Sermon, Announcements & Prayers of the People for The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
September 8th, 2019

Sermon: Rev. Dr. Linda St. Clair.

The Sanctuary called Earth our Island Home

Rev. Dr. Linda St. Clair

Our Canadian philosopher, Marshall McLuhan wrote, rather prophetically; " There are no passengers on space ship earth. We are all crew."

I don't believe that it an idle challenge, but rather a powerful truth that each person on this planet is responsible and has the potential to make a difference by how she/he is working toward the survival of this beautiful life-giving source called the earth.

Some might ask: Why worry about the planet and all its life forms—I am busy enough focusing on my inner spiritual journey, my personal relationship with God and working toward justice for all people...and by the way, peace too!

I suggest, that like the One we follow there are no either or 's rather there're both and's. Did Jesus focus only on one kind of healing? only on the inclusivity of some people? Only justice? Only poverty? Did he just talk about it? Did Jesus only demonstrate it for those in his time or was he preparing the way for those yet to come?

Maybe, just maybe, the answer was as simple as Jesus showing by his life and work what loving relationship means about for everything/everyone and like God/Divine Creator we are to seek and see ALL OUR RELATIONS in that way!

What history repeatedly teaches us is that interdependence exists between all life forms and we ignore this at our peril...and at the peril of future generations. Genocides of peoples and other species as well will limit the potential of all life.

Thomas Berry, an eminent cultural historian, spoke many years ago at a conference I attended. *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* had just been published and he first read to us the dedication of the book to the surprised audience:

To the children

To all the children

To the children who swim beneath

The waves of the sea, to those who live in

The soils of the earth, to the children of the flowers

In the meadows and the trees in the forest, to

All those children who roam over the land

And the winged ones who fly with the winds,

To the human children too, that all the children

May go together into the future in the full

Diversity of their regional communities.

There was a moment of silence and then a standing ovation.

Thomas Berry calls us to know our story of the Universe and to be part of it not only for ourselves but for future generations.

When did you and I start to become aware that there was more to relate to besides ourselves, family/friends? What moved us out beyond those boundaries to explore relationships with people unlike ourselves? What moved us to see others not as objects but as intimates, with what Martin Buber calls the "I-thou vs the I-It" relationship.

When or what started us experiencing relationship with non-human beings? Can you remember a time when you encountered or actually "saw or heard" for the first time something so special in nature, that it stopped you in your tracks? Maybe you didn't know it at the time but only later.

I want to explore briefly some stages in life that may trigger for you memories that reminded us of this expanding universe called life, through the lens of noticing other life forms and relating to them as important to us personally.

If you are like me, it is the younger generation that often serves as a reminder. Children seem to relate effortlessly to other life forms. And not only relate but extend to them to a form of relationship which is key to our hope for the future.

When my grandson David was a preschooler (he is now a freshman in college) he was often taken to the aquarium. He almost always spent most of the time by a small pool where the young fish and aquatic beings could come up very close. One day, when being called to leave, he lingered by the pool and then finally as his mother took him by the hand and asked, "What is the matter David, you look so sad," "Those fish are going to miss me, Mom," he muttered softly. Now whether or not the minnows would miss him, he would miss them!

My granddaughter Erin (who now has two children herself) wanted to "help" her mother, in the garden. So, her baby sister Katherine was put in the playpen where it would be safe to watch. So, Mother and four-year-old daughter began digging in the earth. Mom finally notices a suspicious quietness and she turned to see Erin showing/dangling three little worms over Catherine and her baby sister looking up rather inquisitively. Mom rushed over and said to Erin, "I don't think Catherine should be playing with worms yet, she is not a big girl like

you.” “Okay,” said Erin talking to the worms, “Come along Harry, Mary and Fred. It will be alright.” Mother suggested, “Maybe Harry, Mary and Fred need to go back to their home in the earth.” So, Erin dutifully started to dig. A little while later, her mother wisely asked, “Erin, did you put all the worms back?” “Yes,” replied Erin, “except for Harry.” “Except Harry?????” “Yes,” said Erin, “he was hungry” Her Mother hesitantly asked, “Where did you put him?” “In the fridge!!!” “Yes,” Erin replied, “I am sure he will like lettuce....” Yep there in the crisper was little Harry lying across a head of lettuce in supine splendour.

Erin clearly had decided she had to take care of Harry and she was doing her very best. She had established a relationship with Harry and with it came to some responsibilities.

Over time Erin went to claim other life forms as her friends. In fact, she and her family took care of my dog Skipper when I went to New Zealand for several months and when I returned the bond between her and Skipper was so strong;: guess who became dog-less.

Most of us here today have established a close personal relationship with a domesticated animal like a dog or a cat. Something happens when you “name” a critter. For better or worse, they become more to you. Can share out loud the name of an animal that was special to you? What does saying his/her name out loud do for you and how you feel about them even today”

Maggie was my border collie that I still miss...

And most of us would claim that we loved that animal we named and felt a close bond. And there are those I know who have loved a horse as strongly as I have loved my border collie and cruelty to any animal will bring out a strong response from most of us. And perhaps some of us have joined groups or at least supported groups that advocate for the protection of animals, both wild and tamed.

Moving to other aspects of nature for those of us born on the coast or who have moved here and now live on the island surrounded by the sea, we are bound to feel a connection to the shore and the sea itself.

I can remember when I was 18 crewing on the schooner the Black Dog out of Victoria...we sailed up the coast, in and out of inlets...Princess Louisa and beyond...never once did I spy a freighter moored...as I rode the bowsprit...even in and around Nanaimo...

Two decades later I was visiting my parents for Christmas on Gabriola. Everyone was having a grand time but I was feeling sad for my partner was off in Scotland for the holidays and there was a mail strike. In those days, computers were not available for personal communication.

So, I walked down to the beach, feeling rather sorry for myself and not festive as everyone else. I stared out at the sea across to Pirates Cove and then I got into that space where the sea became a bit of history: my past sailing trips, those of my Uncles and Grandfather who sailed and worked on these waters. I imagined my grandfather sailing past to pick up brick for ballast from the Gabriola Brick factory in 1905. Then I knew that this sea was connecting me to everything and everyone in the world from the past, present and into the future and I was not alone!

So maybe there is a clue for me there about my focus: perhaps the issues of caring for the sea: its sub sea bed impacted by the freighters who anchor for weeks, the garbage it is asked to carry in its waves, the many accidents that cause oil spillage.

Maybe for some here today, it is our evergreen forests the call out to you and the many paths that you can take created by Gault the open up yet another world. What does it tell you when you walk gently on its paths? When you touch the leaves of trees?

Years ago, I was hiking in the mountains of Wyoming with two friends when we came to a meadow with a small stream which called out to me. They wanted to go up the trail a way further so I told my friends to go on, I was going to stop there and they could pick me on the way back and it would only be for a few minutes. I took off my boots, put my feet in the cool stream and laid back looking at the blue sky. Then John Denver's song about getting a Rocky Mountain High flit through my mind but then I turn my head to come face to face with the smallest mountain flower— it had a delicate pink colour and was shaped like a miniature elephant's trunk but no bigger than a dime. I encountered the meaning "small is beautiful" and to this day, I don't remember anything else in any detail about that hike...only that flower!

It was almost as if I was given a glimpse into another land—of incredible beauty and of great value in its own right.

And I vaguely remembered then as a child going to the Saturday matinee at the Park Theatre on Cambie and 18th where they had films for children at a Saturday Matinee. On the screen one day was a picture of a tree...and then a poem called, Trees by Joyce Kilmer.

I think that I shall never see

A poem lovely as a tree.

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest

Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;

A tree that looks at God all day,

And lifts her leafy arms to pray;

A tree that may in Summer wear

A nest of robins in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain;

Who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me,

But only God can make a tree.

This leads me to my conclusion. What I have tried to heighten is our awareness of how important our “relationship” is to this earth, this our island, our home in the vast universe and we share this with many.

I know that we as earthlings are causing a crisis that is so damaging to all that we love and cherish that we must change our casual ways of treating on this earth.

My closing thoughts come from friend and colleague’s book, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World and Global Warming* by Sallie Mc Fague. Sallie is the Distinguished Theologian in Residence at the Vancouver School Theology and the Carpenter Professor of Theology Emeritus at Vanderbilt Divinity School where she taught and former Dean too the Divinity School.

I have come to believe that each of us reflects a unique aspect of God’s glory—and it is this we are called to become.

We are not expected to save the world or become someone or something else: just ourselves. We become ourselves by acknowledging our radical independence on God and on our planet; we find our place to be within God, and with and for other creatures. This is who we are. Freed from having to save ourselves or our world, we rest in God, whose body, the world, supports, delights, and calls for our help. To give this help, we have a place in which to stand; within God for the earth. And now we can get to work.

Let us stop building OUR kingdoms and be usable in the kingdom of GOD.

(paraphrasing Richard Rohr: Everything Belongs.)