

Sunday, April 22, 2018

Psalm 23

I John 3:16-24

John 10:11-18

In Truth and Action: Earth Day

On Thursday April 19 at 8:01 there was a loud noise which sounded like a low flying jet hovering over the neighbourhood. It was really loud and shook the foundation of some houses. It lasted around 20 seconds or so and then it stopped. People had emerged from their houses looked at their neighbours in wonder and then went back inside not sure of what had occurred. This was an earthquake- the shaking of the ground from within the earth itself. The centre was in Amherstburg, not too far from here. In the moments before the noise, our cat was pacing at the window, with her ears perked, then the noise started. Could she have heard it before we did?

It wasn't until later when watching the news that we learned it was an earthquake measured at 4.1. I realized again that we really are on a big blue marble in space and that portions of this marble are able to move from within. This is a different perspective of the universe, our world, and the Earth itself.

Today is Earth Day which first began in 1970 when millions of people took to the streets to protest the negative impacts of 150 years of industrial development. In the US and around the world, smog was becoming deadly and evidence was growing that pollution led to developmental delays in children. Biodiversity was in decline as a result of the heavy use of pesticides and other pollutants. The global ecological awareness was growing and in the US the Environmental Protection Agency was created. Around the world similar agencies, government committees and community outreach groups were established to stop pollution.

Earth Day is now a global gathering which includes active participation of over 1 billion people in 192 countries and this day is now regarded as the largest civic-focused day of action in the world. It is a day of political action and participation which often begins a week of activities of outdoor clean-up of yards, parks and planting trees. People will also use this day to protest illegal chemical dumping into waterways and how unsafe mining activities which are completed deep in the earth, are damaging the natural resource basis and causing shifts and instability of the earth. Today is also a day to think about one's daily activities and how what we do and do not do makes a difference to the future of our home- Earth.

The Earth Day Network leads Earth Day activities worldwide and the focus this year is on getting the world to End Plastic Pollution and specifically creating support to eliminate single-

use plastics and getting regulation for its proper disposal. This month's UC Observer's cover story describes this problem as growing worse each day. From poisoning and injuring marine life, to the presence of plastics in our food, to disrupting human hormones and causing major life-threatening diseases as well as early onset puberty, the growth of plastic pollution is threatening Earth. Yet we search for straws, covers for coffee cups and use plastic bags for garbage, and for many—this is so that we have the convenience of buying something and taking it away. It is time to rethink what we are using in the form of plastics.

It is Earth Day and what have been doing about its care? Psalm 24 states that "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it." God made everything and yet he is most proud of the human creature which he gave complete control over his creation. Well we humans have done a lousy job so far. Not everyone has access to clean and safe water to drink so much so that beer companies are now looking to support clean water development in Africa. (Stella Artois). Not every city has flushing facilities which lead to treatment plants for sewage. But here we flush several times per day, drink out of plastic water bottles and look at wasting more time and energy in doing little to help creation. And I think experiencing the earthquake might have shook us up to realize we need to care for the EARTH as it is the only place we know we can live.

Jesus was teaching his disciples about sheep and shepherds. Many of those listening could relate to this story for as young men they would have tended to the needs of sheep as they grazed over the pastures. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd and I know my sheep and my sheep know me." Jesus knows us and he knows all that we do and he still loves us. He also taught that he would lay down his life for his sheep. A good shepherd would do this—put his life on the line for the sheep which might have wandered away. After all, the owner did not hire him to sleep. The shepherd was hired to build a relationship with the animals. A relationship of trust—that the shepherd would lead the sheep to quiet waters and that they would be safe from predators.

When we reflect on the earth and our relationship with it, we almost want to eliminate ourselves because we are guilty of not caring for it. We only want to look after our own needs and then maybe the earth. Yet Jesus states that a good shepherd puts his life on the line for those whom he cares for. How often do we even feel remotely inclined to risk ourselves for the earth when it is so easy to do nothing?

When we think of how our earth is hurting in these last months, we will remember the droughts, the floods, the high winds, the earthquakes and even wild fires. But what are we doing? Maybe putting a few cans in the recycle bin. What more can we do?

Jesus said that to truly know what love is for another-means putting our life on the line, or at least picking up a cause for action. In 1970 people started the movement that strives on getting everything corrected after the errors of the past become known. Yet Jesus knew this when he died on the cross, he gave up his life for others. Not because he wanted to but because God called him to do so as he was God's Son. His purpose was to save us and give to us the gift, hope and promise of eternal life.

God calls us to be stewards of the earth, and in our statement of faith we are to "live with respect in creation" but how faithful are we to this statement? If we truly love living on this planet and want future generations to be able to do so also, we need to reduce the amount of garbage we throw out, get rid of plastics used for one purpose and to engage people to take responsibility for choosing to reject, reduce, reuse and recycle plastics. This is taking care of what has been entrusted to us.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd and he knows us, calls us by name and loves us. As we reflect on the earth and its challenges of even the last three years—droughts, floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, and the imbalance of the having the basic necessities of life, we might wonder what the future may hold for this planet?

Jesus the Shepherd continues to guide us to find the places where we need to rest, reflect and react to situations in our lives. Jesus continues to be the one who will help us in times of stress, uncertainty and even when the earth moves, the waters come and the sky is filled with smoke. And when all is clear again, he calms our hearts as we are guided along the calm waters to drink again in his spirit which offers us new life.

Earth Day reminds us all that we live together on this planet and we are its stewards and caretakers. We need to take action to clean up messes, to prevent damage and diseases to other members of God's creation and it means looking beyond yourself to do what you can do to help take care of the world.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who calls us to live in truth as we follow his teachings to love one another. This might lead us to act on behalf of animals, sea creatures and people who are seeing their part of the earth destroyed or exploited. How do you respond? One needs to first pray about the situation, learn more about what is happening to affect God's creatures including people and to take responsible action. Be it cleaning up a park or petitioning the government or companies to do something different. It does not matter how old you are—you can do something. Jesus calls you by name because he loves you. Call on him as well so that you may be lead back to the clean calming waters which bring hope to all people. In truth and in action- the Good Shepherd will guide you not only on this Earth Day, but every day. Amen.