

“God’s World”
Rev. Joyce Kirk-Moore

Psalm 148:1-13
San Dimas Community Church, UCC

April 18, 2010

In 1944, while 15-year-old Anne Frank was hiding from the Nazis with her family in a secret Amsterdam loft, she wrote these words in her journal:

The best remedy for those who are frightened, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere they can be alone, alone with the sky, nature, and God. For then and only then can you feel that everything is as it should be and that God wants people to be happy amid nature’s beauty and simplicity. As long as this exists, and that should be forever, I know that there will be solace for every sorrow, whatever the circumstance. I firmly believe that nature can bring comfort to all who suffer.

Just imagine how intensely Anne Frank must have longed to go outside and celebrate God’s world!

Humankind has not always shown Anne Frank’s love of God’s creation. We often have interpreted the creation story in Genesis as permission to have dominance over creation with little responsibility for its care. Those who have studied the book of Genesis with Tom, know that that’s not what being stewards of the garden was all about.

In fact, the Hebrew people distinguished themselves from other ancient cultures partly *because* they cherished the glory of all God had made as we heard in the Psalm read this morning.

One scientist describes “Earth’s Story” this way: If we think of the Earth’s history in ten volumes of five hundred pages each, so that each page records a million years, human beings don’t appear until page 499 of the 10th volume. The last two words on the last page recount our story. When we reach the last letter of the last word on the last page, humanity begins to turn the tide against life and begins the process of killing the planet. What God has created through so many years is so fragile and vulnerable to what human beings can do to it!

Next Thursday is Earth Day. On the Sunday before Earth Day, the United Church of Christ suggests we think about the Holy that dwells within every part of the created order of life. We usually don’t think about God’s presence in every blade of grass, every cloud, every rain drop. All life is God’s creation and is to be cherished for the spirit of the divine that is incarnate within it.

Howard Clinebell taught pastoral care and counseling at Claremont School of Theology. In his retirement he wrote the book *Ecotherapy*. Ecotherapy is both healing for the ecosystem and healing for humankind as we connect with the ecosystem. He gives an example of a teacher who engages students in the following exercise. First she has them call out the problems of the world randomly as she writes them on the board. This doesn’t take very long.

Then she asks them to draw a picture of their feelings about the world's problems. Then they share their pictures with another student. This usually leads them to name the pain that they feel for the problems the earth faces. Then the teacher directs them back to the board where they have listed the world's problems and asks which of these problems are connected. Quickly, she says, "students call out that Third World debt is connected to deforestation, ...or AIDS in Africa is connected to illiteracy, which is connected to poverty, and so on. Very soon, the board is full of connecting arrows."

Then she asks her students to pick just one problem that he or she feels drawn to work on and notice all the arrows attached to it. If they follow the arrows they realize that by working on one problem they will affect many other problems in positive ways. She says this: "The challenge is to find one's niche, one's particular way of contributing to the world."

Here is the story of how one woman Wangari Maathai and the women and children of Kenya found their way to participate in the earth's healing. Maathai says, "I became exposed to many of the problems women are facing--problems of firewood, malnutrition, lack of food and adequate water, unemployment, soil erosion." She understood that these problems were rooted in problems such as the deforestation and loss of topsoil in Kenya. So on June 5, 1977, 32 years ago, in her own backyard, she planted seven trees. Then she went to other women and talked about planting trees.

Then these women went to schools and got children to dig holes, plant trees, and care for them. The children spread the word and got their mothers involved. Women collected tree seeds in the folds of their skirts. Maathai began what came to be called the Green Belt Movement in Kenya. In only 16 years more than a million school children became involved. More than 10 million trees were planted throughout Kenya. Nurseries, mostly operated by women, are growing trees. Maathai says, "The weight of the environmental crisis the rural women have been carrying on their backs is being lessened, one seed at a time." It all started in her own back yard. Maathai won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace.

In 2001 Tom was on sabbatical and we went to Montana for his research, and while we were there, we traveled to Glacier National Park. I've never seen such a beautiful place! This painting by our own local artist, Lorna Skeie, caught my eye the first time I visited her home. It is of a famous vista in Glacier. Both Kermit and Tom shared a love for the beauty of this park. Recently in the *Los Angeles Times*, an article noted that two of the 27 named glaciers in that park have completely disappeared, and it is expected that in a decade all will be gone. Tom doesn't know it yet, but last Sunday, I bought this painting for his birthday coming up in a couple of weeks so that a part of God's beautiful handiwork in Glacier will always be present in our home.

Tom says the Hebrew word for "tilling" the garden of Eden is more like being a servant to or a slave in its service. We are to be servants to the earth--serving *it* rather

than just being served by it. We can't do it all. But neither do we need to feel "it's so overwhelming, I give up!"

We can find our niche to which we can devote our efforts and like Maathai, we can begin in our own back yard.

When Jesus walked the earth, he spent much time in nature. Some of his best sermons were preached out-of-doors. He found solace in gardens or by the seashore. He went to the mountains to heal his soul. He even used dirt into which he had spit to heal the eyes of a blind man. Just perhaps as we nurture and heal the earth, we will find our own healing.

In closing, I've asked Jennifer to sing hymn #569 as we reflect on God's world:

Touch the earth lightly, use the earth gently, nourish the life of the world in our care: Gift of great wonder, ours to surrender, trust for the children tomorrow will bear.

We who endanger, who create hunger, agents of death for all creatures that live, We who would foster clouds of disaster--God of our planet, forestall and forgive!

Let there be greening, birth from the burning, water that blesses, and air that is sweet, Health in God's garden, hope in God's children, regeneration that peace will complete.

God of all living, God of all loving, God of the seedling, the snow, and the sun, Teach us, deflect us, Christ reconnect us, using us gently, and making us one. AMEN.