

Arvada
United Methodist Church

April 26, 2009
Job 12: 7-10;

Rippling Beauty
Psalm 104: 1-6

Rev. Valerie Oden
Earth Day Celebration

I am interested in hearing where you experience the beauty of creation. Maybe it's a special spot on the earth, where the divine presents itself through the natural world. Maybe you've seen it in animals or human life. You know it, your favorite place of beauty: the bend in the road where that magnificent scene appears; which part of the river the fish hang out; where in your garden's growth abounds, or the sun shines the most; the scent of a certain part of the Arvada trails as the trees begin to bud; the certain way your pet greets you.

We've all experienced the beauty of the earth in such a way as to be inspired by it. Where have you seen it? What is the most beautiful place to you?

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Places of beauty bring with them almost always a sense of awe, gratitude, sometimes humility as we wonder how it all got here, and why.

Experiencing the beauty of the earth can change our footsteps, escort us into a softer way of walking through our days, change the footprint we leave behind.

Outside of these experiences of beauty, we often take it for granted—this thing we call the earth and its laws of nature and how it spins along in constant regeneration.

Consider the law of gravity. Be mindful of the fact that we are not floating around this room right now. We don't think about it. And yet we are being held in our seats at this very moment by something invisible that we never consider.

Did you know that right now we are actually traveling at 66,000 mph? That's how fast the earth is moving around the sun. But we don't realize it. So many things are happening right now, in this miracle we call life. Right now, trees are working to produce their leaves for the spring; plants around the church and in our homes are converting water and light into more growth.

I pulled a stick out of the yard a bit ago, a dead broken branch from a bush, to support a tall stalk of a dying houseplant. I pulled it off the ground and stuck it in the pot. And now, it's budding. Just a stick! Who would have known there was life inside it?

It's happening all around us, within us, all the time—Life. How do we humans honor the miracle of the natural world and whatever is the creative energy behind its ways?

Theologian Sally McFague says that the way we learn to love creation is by *paying attention* to it. Perhaps that's the first step in letting the divine have us-- paying attention

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to the beauty intrinsic in every moment, walking with a heart and mind open to life's natural swirl going on in us and around us all the time.

Remember Alice Walker's famous line: "I think it pisses God off if we walk by the color purple in the field and don't notice it." When we pay attention to life's gifts, our hearts will change, and then our footsteps.

When we're paying attention, gratitude and awe follow. And these will change the way we're being. We are different in the presence of the sacred. We walk more softly. We tend to whisper.

When I was a kid, we spent every summer in a cabin in southwestern Colorado half way between the little towns of Creed and Lake City. Several times each summer, as the sun began to give way to dusk, we would pack our mosquito repellent and flashlights and walk the half mile to where beavers had created 28 beaver ponds. As we approached the ponds, our voices would drop to a whisper. We would find our big rock and sit quietly and watch the beavers work.

As we watched them, we never spoke in anything but a soft whisper; for even as children, whispering was easy as we experienced this amazing spectacle of animals building a home. That's how it is in the presence of the sacred, after all. When we're paying attention, life evokes a sense of awe.

Think again of your favorite place of the natural world. Think of how it softens your heart, automatically makes *you* walk more softly. Awe does that—causes us to move more softly.

It is time to move more softly up on the earth. It is time to change our footsteps and our footprint. *It is* time to respond to the crisis of our natural world. Not since the last ice age has the fragile ecosystem that makes the whole thing work been threatened the way it is now. And we humans have done it. The earth and its critters and your favorite place on earth cannot change their course. Only we can. We are the only critters who can experience beauty, gratitude, awe. And we are the only ones who can change the course of our earth's future.

A friend visited a monastery in Europe, which was built on the side of a cliff over an ocean. To get to the monastery, she had to climb in a huge basket and be hauled up by a little monk pulling on a rope. She stood in the basket, watching the monk. Then she looked at the rope, and noticed it was a bit frayed. She looked at the ground; she looked at the top of the cliff. She looked at the rope. Then she asked the monk, "So, how often do you change that rope?" The monk looked at her for a bit, then grinned. "When it breaks."

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Our rope is frayed; on the verge of breaking. Either we change it now, change our habits and patterns of life, or when it breaks, it will carry in its tumble not just us, but life as we know it.

But will we respond? Will I?

Suggestions abound for what we might do, what we might change in our personal habits. And if you're like me, you see these suggestions and you tend to avert your eyes. I don't WANT to hear those ideas because I would have to change my habits! I KNOW I should be biking to work! It's a super idea at 7:00 in the evening! But then, always, 7:00 in the morning rolls around, and it looks very different.

Tomorrow, I say, each 7:00 in the morning. Tomorrow I will tackle the Arvada hills that lead up to this church and bike to work. Tomorrow I will bike to the store. Tomorrow I will turn the heat down. Tomorrow I will wrap my furnace. Tomorrow I'll start using a clothesline. These simple suggestions come to us so easily. We know what they are, and we know they're good. And still I say, tomorrow.

But friends, we are almost out of tomorrows.

It is time, now, for us to let go of our old ways. It is time, now, to grow into maturity in how we see our relationship with the natural world. Only we humans can change our course, for the power is only in our hands. It's not in the hands of the beavers or the mountains or not even the dogs of the world in spite of evidence to the contrary for those of us who have canine companions. It's in *our* hands.

The movie Spiderman has a line in it: "With great power comes great responsibility." The power that humanity has to destroy or to save this planet is an awesome responsibility. And it is a matter of the spirit. It is a matter of our faith that tells us that life is about more than *just us*. It is a matter of paying attention to our world, letting our hearts be moved by gratitude and awe in the presence of sacred beauty, seeing the intrinsic value of life and its critters, and responding rightly. We *are* responsible for this earth. We call our response being *stewards*, caretakers of and co-creators with creation.

First, we pay attention. That brings awe and gratitude, and responsibility. Then action. It is letting the *awe* have us that will change our habits.

"The world is charged with the grandeur of God," says poet Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Shall we begin now, honoring the grandeur of this thing we call the earth, and its amazing array of diverse critters?

We need only pay attention to how it touches our heart, letting the beauty of the earth have us. Then we *will* walk gently it, and leave its gifts intact for generations to follow.

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