

Reverence for Creation Reflections on Earth Day and Our Life of Faith

This past weekend the world celebrated Earth Day, and in honor of that I would like to reflect on the practice of Reverence for Creation. The reverence for creation is that space where we move beyond ourselves into the beauty and purpose of the natural world. Far from a Johnny-come-lately modern emphasis on “going green” reverence for creation is a practice that has invited us into the fullness of God’s life since we came out of the primordial stew.

In the book of Genesis we see that with delight, God proclaims the goodness of creation. Genesis also tells us that we are created in the image of God. This image of God is meant to be reflected in the responsibility we are given over the created order in order to tend and secure its wellbeing. We have been given “dominion” over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth in the same way that God has dominion over humankind.

What we have long forgotten to reflect is that God’s practice of dominion is characterized by mercy, gentleness, compassion, and caretaking. We are meant to care for creation the way that God cares for us. Just as God desires our wholeness and joy we were meant to offer the land and the creatures of the land, the sea, and the air this same chance to flourish and be nurtured by a loving hand.

Joan Chittister reminds us that the Creed also gives a testimony to creation that we, the human creature, have far too long ignored. “God, the Creed insists, created the earth. The earth, like us in other words, breathes the breath of God.” She goes on to say that the simplicity of this statement overwhelms and she asks, “what is it that has been created by God that does not reflect the presence of God? What is it created by God that can so cavalierly be destroyed without remorse, without awareness of the divine life within it?”^[1]

Christians revere nature as a creation that is cause for awe, given its power and magnificence, which, in turn, fosters a sense of the human limit and frailty. As God is the Creator, the creation glorifies God; [Creation] witnesses to God’s glory, majesty, power, and goodness. “Human life stands as part of the creation, dependent upon the created order whose purpose is beyond understanding.”^[2]

Nature provides the very conditions that make human life possible; we are dependent on creation for our very well being. But, we should never misunderstand that the earth and all that is in it was created only for the sake of humanity, as if humans are the center of the world and as if all of

^[1] Joan Chittister, *In Search of Belief*, Liguori/Triumph 2009, Missouri, page 57.

^[2] Schlafer/Sedgwick.

creation were for our enjoyment and satisfaction. Creation has its own beauty and goodness that demands recognition and has a means and an end that extends far beyond our use of it and its resources.^[3]

As Christians, the practice of reverence for creations asks us to examine deeply moral questions that will challenge us to think about many things. There are life-sustaining methods in use for how we interact with the environment and animals, but others that destroy wantonly for the sake of profit without regard for humane or sustainable factors. But often these potential abuses support economies, livelihoods and the economic prosperity of towns and communities. These are very difficult questions with no easy answers. So how, as Christians, do we begin to think on these dilemmas? I think perhaps having the courage to ask the tough questions is the first step. Opening our eyes to see that there is in fact a giant divide between God's desires for our husbandry of creation and how we have ultimately dominated and put it in peril at least helps us begin the journey and exploration of the things great and small that we can do in the immediate time. Recycling, thinking about buying local, humanely raised and slaughtered meats, adopting animals from shelters and having them neutered and spayed, cease using water bottled in plastic. These are the small, accessible things we can do as we begin to reflect on the restoration of God's true desired relationship between the human and the rest of the created order.

How we, as Christians, take care of the natural world reflects our core values as God's people. Earth Day is an invitation to focus our attention on the specific actions that we can take to care for what has been entrusted to us. The world is God's good creation. Thinking about how we treat the Earth helps the faithful to navigate the narrow path between what is broken in the world and how we can partner with Christ in reconciling all that is broken to God.

Grace and Peace, Stephanie+

^[3] Ibid.