

St James United Church



Message for September 17, 2023 The Second Sunday of Creation

“Called to Shared Action” - Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

Readings: Exodus 14:19-27; Romans 14:1-12; Excerpt from *The Letters of Pelagius: Celtic Soul Friend*, ed. Robert Van de Weyer (Arthur James, 1995), 71.

If I may, I'd like to begin my reflection this morning where I left off last week with a call for us to nurture our relationship with creation because when we do we nurture our relationship with each other and with God. It works that way because we are interconnected, interdependent. Take the storms this summer with flooding, surges, the catastrophe in Libya as two dams failed because of rain from a powerful medicane. Scientists have made the connection repeatedly between increased CO₂ emissions and the warmer oceans which fuel such storms. Sadly, we still have people saying it is all part of a natural cycle and so it's okay for human activities to proceed unchanged. They can't. We need to collectively lower our impact on our world. The citizens of Derna are counting on it, as are the folks in Port aux Basques rebuilding after Fiona.

As I said last week, we resist making changes partly because we think we're distinct from nature and so don't really have an impact. But this forgets that economics and ecology have the same root, *oikos* or household. What is a household if not a family? And our global family, human and nonhuman, is in a crisis because some members think that their needs have greater priority than others. That was the message of the young people who walked from MUN to the Confederation Building on Friday. They feel their future is being forfeited for the benefit of generations who do not have to live through the impacts of too slow a transition from fossil fuels. They have a point. I felt a bit guilty as I walked with them along Prince Phillip Drive.

We see similar dynamics in Exodus, including just before this morning's portion starts. Pharaoh sends the army to recapture the Hebrews. As chariots appear, the people are understandably afraid, questioning Moses' motives, God's as well. But as the story unfolds, it's clear that God's allegiance doesn't lie with those intent on forfeiting someone else's future. God rescues those being forfeited. Interestingly, according to Rabbi Sharon Cohen of Hebrew College, the focus isn't on God's power to make this rescue despite movie depictions. She notes how God rebukes Moses for telling the people to trust God's power, that he should tell the people to move forward as he stretched out his arm. For her this gesture is less about the sea than the people, God telling Moses to stretch out his arm with caring and encouragement because the people needed to know Moses had faith in them, so they in turn could have faith in themselves.

Interestingly, Pelagius makes a similar point, albeit indirectly as he writes how God's spirit isn't something only humans share but is cross species, cross genus, even cross kingdom, making

all of life, whole ecosystems beautiful. His statement is an assertion of God's grace in us, that despite what Augustine and others of the time thought of the impact of the fall of Adam and Eve on us, that humans aren't ugly with sin but like forest animals and birds, trees and crops, are blessed by God's spirit at work in our lives. Again it's about having faith in each other, as well as trusting in nature instead of trying to control it. When we do, God works through us and amazing things can happen, or as we hear in the story, the sea parts for the people heading into the wilderness where they'd live a more cooperative relationship with nature while the sea turned on those who wanted to exploit and control nature, and oppress other people.

Now as I say this, I realize it is not black and white, more shades of grey as we seek solutions for our ecological crisis, so that we don't create an economic one. We need balance as we transition from oil and gas. After all, we need royalties from oil to help our province run; but we can't stretch out the transition indefinitely, especially not with oil projected to be only half as valuable by 2030. It's tricky, so we need to listen to each other, have faith in each other, to pull it off. In all this I find Paul's advice helpful, telling the Christians in Rome to encourage rather than judge each other, to recognize there are multiple ways to be faithful to God. Now Paul was speaking about the divide between Christians with a Jewish heritage and those raised Gentile, but his words can apply to taking climate action. For example, for some it may make more sense to replace drafty windows than to switch from an oil furnace to a heat pump, while making the conversion may be right for others, like it was for me and Glen. The key, as Paul wrote, is not judging each other for what we can and can't do. Besides, judgement tends to backfire with many of us digging in our heels if we feel attacked. In addition, the sheer scope of the issue can leave many feeling paralysed, and we end up doing nothing even if we want to.

Fortunately, there are more solutions than we realize. Some rely on technology, but many more rely on us working with nature not against it. As I shared earlier, we see this in the work of Project Drawdown which compiled a list of nearly a hundred solutions across nine sectors like education, agriculture, industry, transportation, where we not just reduce greenhouse gas emissions but can draw down their concentration in the atmosphere. I encourage you to look them up. You'll find approaches ranging from restoring wetlands and adding bike infrastructure to increasing recycling, integrating trees into pastures and eating a more plant rich diet. Contrary to what we're often told by those who want to drag out the transition, solutions are currently available, growing in scale and financially viable. The breadth of them restores my faith in my and all of our ability to act. Youth and citizens around the world are counting on that.

As these last months have shown us, the climate is changing, and members of our household are suffering. They're suffering because we're interdependent, our actions having a negative impact on climate and more. By the same principle, our positive actions, joined together, make a difference. That's how Exodus worked. God not acting for the people but through Moses, and ultimately through the people too, to respond to their need. And God still does this. So let's act. As we do God works through us as we work with nature to heal our beautiful world. Amen.