

The Liturgy for April 26, 2020

~Gathering /Intro:

Hi Everyone. And Happy Easter. Happy 3rd Sunday in the Great and lengthy season of Easter! And... Happy Season of Questions!

If you were with us last week, when we gathered around the story of Thomas (the apostle who seems unfairly named Doubting, when Questioning seems more apt!); I explained my secret yearning to establish a Thomas Sunday, or a Sunday where we could dig into some questions of our faith, our doubts, our curiosities of why we do the odd things we do at church... questions that you, the community, would send me

So...be careful what you wish for! So many wonderful, beautiful questions arrived for me, that it was decided that we would move into a Season of Questions!

Today's question that is forming and informing our worship comes from Kailey and Becca Wight. These sisters are curious about creation: How the world came into being? Do we have to choose between God and science?

So, settle in, ..today's service will take about a week...

But what a perfect question to delve into as earlier this week was the 50th Anniversary of EARTH DAY!

~Acknowledging the Light of Creation

~Call to Worship:

Leader: Christ is risen!

People: Christ is risen indeed!

Leader: Alleluia!

People: Alleluia and Amen!

Opening Prayer (by farmer/theologian/poet Wendell Berry)

When despair for the world grows in me and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,

I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief.

I come into the presence of still water. And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light.

For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

~Six Feet Of Nature....

~**Scripture:** Genesis 1: [God Makes A World, from Ralph Milton's *The Family Story Bible*]

Long, long, long ago, before there was anything, before there was a world, before there was light, before there was darkness, there was God.

Just God. All alone.

So God decided to make the world.

God said: *Let there be light.*

So there was.

Beautiful light, shining everywhere.

And God said: *That's good.*

Then God said: *Let there be a sky above, and water below.*

So there was.

And God said: *That's good.*

Then God said: *Let there be green plants and tall trees and grass and beautiful flowers. And let them all make seeds so there can be new plants when the old ones die.*

So there were.

And God said: *That's good.*

Then God said: *Let there be a golden sun in the sky in the daytime, and a silver moon at night.*

So there was.

And God said: *That's good.*

Then God said: *Let there be all kinds of shiny fish in the sea and bright coloured birds to fly in the air. And let the fish have baby fish and the birds have baby birds, so there can always be new birds and fish when the old ones die.*

So there were.

And God said: *That's good.*

Then God said: *Let there be animals on the land. All kinds of animals that run and crawl and gallop.*

So there were.

And God said: *That's good.*

Then God said: *Let there be people in the world, and let the people be made so they are like me.*

So God created people. And God said to the people: *Let there be new babies born so there will always be new people in my world when the old people die.*

Then God said to the people: *Take care of my world. It's yours. All of it. But please be kind to my world.*

Then God looked at all the world, and all the beautiful things in it.

And God said: *That's VERY good.*

And when it was all done, God rested. AMEN.

~Reflection:

Thus goes the story of creation according to our faith tradition. It is the very first story in our scripture. Long, long, long ago, or ...”In the beginning...”

From the very first person who ever walked this world, surely they looked around and up and down: Glory!! Creation is AMAZING.

And it is the most natural thing in the world to then say: So...How did this happen? How was the world made? WONDERFUL QUESTIONS!!

The trouble is, that sometimes we humans have made a habit of letting the way we answer questions divide us.

So questions about how this world was made, become:

So, do you believe what the bible says about creation? **OR**

Do you believe what science says?

CHOOSE!

Which is a disappointing way to discuss something as beautiful and mysterious as creation don't you think?

So, instead, let's open the question up a little bit, to ask:

What do we mean by “what the Bible says about creation?”

I imagine we are asking about the whole Genesis story of God making this world in 7 days...well 6, taking a well deserved rest after that work!

Now there are some Christians who take that to mean quite literally 6 days. For some, this is where their faith calls them.

But I look at it differently.

The Hebrew scriptures, the OT, all of our scriptures in fact, were never designed to be read as a hard rule, or as a factual manual; never meant to be a historical or scientific work.

Instead it is a collection of stories of our ancestors in the faith, and where they have experienced the Living God. Nothing less.

So old they come from the oral tradition, before the written word,

So sacred that they were passed along: around campfires under starry skies, as they walked sandy desserts and tended sheep and crossed rivers.

and we read them still today.

So, yes, human fingerprints are all over our sacred stories. They are full of contradictions and repetitions and jumbled ways of telling a story.

For instance, there are not 1 but 2 creation stories in Genesis.

Written some time apart.

One is the story we heard today from Genesis 1, with the 6 days, and different parts of creation emerging each day,

World being formed in stages if you will...

If you read “day” to mean “an indeterminate amount of time,” you might even say it reads as evolutionary...

The second Creation story is in Genesis 2: 4, and in it creation seems to have taken place all in one day...in one go, with humans being created before any plants life.

What are we to make of that???

Well, clearly we would do well to put aside any notion that the scriptures are to be taken strictly literally.

The bible oughtn't to be taken as a flat one dimensional document:

They are living stories with all sorts of contours. They have shifted over time, because at different times and stages of the world, people viewed the world differently.

Over time, they asked different questions of it.

Their understandings of technology and understandings of earth sciences and biology and astronomy changed over time.

And aren't our lives enriched by these offerings from science?

I for one love that we have researchers whose lives are lit up from the wonders of science. I can take in only so much of what they are telling me, but I love to hear their excitement as they tell us “we now think that 13.8 billion years ago a cosmic fireball appeared from what seemed to be nothing. 5 billion years ago the solar system

Our planet 4.54 billion years ago,

Science tells us this because science has always asked great questions:

How did the world form?

How old is that star?

Why is the sky blue?

Theology asks great questions too: But different ones.

“The question is not ‘Did it happen that way?’ Just like that? If not, How? When?

But, instead, ‘**What does it mean?**’

The Genesis story says it means that God created the world in love,

God created the world seeking relationship, to have companions,

And after we were created God pronounced us Good. So good.

Isn't that a beautiful thing to hear?

On your worst day, when you are having some serious self doubts?

You are, just as you are...so good.

So good, in fact, that I have plans for you to share in the care of this creation, says God.

Because this creation – all of it – it is sacred.

And yes, unlike science we have in our scriptures some wild tales about the trees that clap their hands and mountains that skip.

It's a way of telling us that nature is soulful and capable of praise. God's breath is within them.

Creation and science, the natural world are not either / or.

We need to read the book of Scripture with the book of nature, otherwise we risk hearing only half of what God has to say.

If we listen to Scripture without creation, we lose the vastness, the wonder of hoofs pounding and rain dripping and sun warming and bees buzzing....

If we listen to nature without Scripture, we lose intimacy. The stories that tell us: God saw everything and declared all of nature, all of us GOOD.

Very Good. That God created us all so as to be in relationship, to keep company with us all. Our faith is in the living God, who is infusing the world with meaning and purpose,

who always goes ahead of us, speaking, calling, and creating. Saying come on, partner with me in this glorious, hurting old world.

~Closing Prayer in Honour of Earth Day (based on the UCC's *A Song of Faith*, 2006.)

Holy One,

Each part of creation reveals unique aspects of you, the one we call Creator.

For you are both in creation and beyond it.

All parts of creation, animate and inanimate, are related.

We delight that you made humans to live and move
and have their being in you.

For in and with you, O God,

we can direct our lives toward right relationship
with each other and all of creation.

May we discover our place as one strand in the web of life.

May we grow in wisdom and compassion.

May we recognize all people as kin.

And may we accept our mortality and finitude, not as a curse,
but as a challenge to make our lives and choices matter.

~Benediction