

TRINITY SUNDAY, June 7, 2020
“Co-Creators of the Earth” (Psalm 8)

I cannot remember a time before I had my hands in soil. In our family albums, there are photos of me, barely more than a toddler, “helping” my Dad in his vegetable garden. As I grew, I went from simply dropping the seed potatoes he cut into the holes he dug to carefully sprinkling tiny lettuce seeds or spacing peas and beans along his rows to actually wielding the rake, moving the line and preparing the shallow trenches for planting - all naturally, under his watchful supervisory eye.

Then came the spring, we were standing out in the garden, talking about the vegetable season ahead when Dad pointed to a small section. That was to be mine to plant and tend; to grow whatever I chose. I couldn’t believe it. My father was giving me part of his precious garden. He was entrusting it to my care. I felt both honoured - he was recognizing my capability and maturity - and a little scared - yes, he would be there to consult, but I would be responsible for this garden’s wellbeing.

I feel this same sense of honour and responsibility as I listen to these words of the psalmist. This poet looks up into a clear night sky - at the moon and a myriad of stars - the amazing beauty of the heavens. According to the Hebrew understanding of that time, God created the heavens as a dome to bring order out of chaos by separating the waters. Windows in this dome could be opened to allow the waters above to descend as they did to disastrous effect at the time of Noah. As for the earth, it was regarded as a flat disc supported on pillars with water below and all around. The psalmist did not have our twenty-first century appreciation of the immensity of space nor the awareness that ours is not the only galaxy. Still, just looking up was enough to bring

the psalmist in touch with our human smallness: “what is woman that You rejoice in her, and man that You do delight in him?”

Do these words resonate with you? Are there times when you have felt very small? Like the toddler in a crowd of adult women, making his way through a forest of legs, finally throwing his arms around my kneecap, sure that at last, he had found his mother, only to look way, way up; see my face and scream. Like me in the bow of a two person kayak. We had been exploring the islands of Haida Gwaii, but now we were facing straight out into the Pacific - no land in sight; no other boats; below us, the deeps, the domain of grey whales, fur seals and fish. Like all of us perhaps in the face of COVID-19, unsure of how to stop its spread, not knowing if and when a vaccine will be found, wondering when our lives will return to anything like normal.

Sometimes, other human beings may try to make us feel small. Executives sitting in corner offices, behind massive desks, while we perch in front, on uncomfortable chairs - the whole atmosphere designed to intimidate. An abusive husband telling his wife day after day that she is fat and ugly, stupid and useless until she herself believes it is true. Riot police, wearing body armour and carrying shields and batons using tear gas, flash bangs, and blows to push back peaceful protesters as happened in Washington DC. Experts, whether in technology or theology, finance or the culinary arts using their specialized vocabulary to dazzle and befuddle, leaving the rest of us feeling woefully ignorant. Racist regimes imposing systems like South Africa’s apartheid, putting people in categories according to colour, privileging with more rights and opportunities, one group over another.

At times in our lives, each and every one of us may feel small - unimportant, insignificant, unable to make a difference. Just like the psalmist. But then this poet remembers something - something amazing. We are all created in the image of God. We are unique. We are loved. We are of value. Not just those who are especially well educated or skilled, artistic or inventive. But each and every one of us. No matter what label has been stuck on us by our families or society. No matter what adjectives anyone might choose to describe us. We are God's own precious children, and we have been entrusted by God with responsibility as co-creators of the earth.

We have a role in caring for creation. Our actions have an impact on the environment. Just how much has been underlined during this pandemic. As factories shut down and people stayed home, skies became blue, and air quality improved; the water in the canals in Venice grew clear; flamingos arrived in such numbers in Mumbai that the shoreline turned pink; elk strolled down the streets and looked in the windows of people self-isolating at home; birds were heard singing in the heart of usually noisy bustling Italian cities. As we look at these skies and waters as we see and hear these animal and birds, the question arises: when this pandemic is over, will we return to the way things were before or will we choose to do some things differently? Might we commute less and work more from home; fly less to meetings and gather more on Zoom; drive less and walk and bike more? After not being allowed to enter stores, and malls, after limiting our grocery expeditions to once a week, will we be more inclined to make do and re-use; less eager to buy the latest model, wear the hottest trends? After having the incentive to grow our own food for fear of shortages, and the time to garden, will we keep on with our vegetable patches or revert to manicured lawns and

supermarket produce? After having the peace and quiet in which to observe wildlife and enjoy bird song will we be more aware of the creatures who share this planet and concerned for their well-being?

Our words and actions have an impact on other human being as we have been reminded by recent events South of the border, and by the stories of people here in Canada who have encountered racism. A black teacher in Regina discovers that a neighbour took a video of him getting stuff out of his own trunk and posted it on social media with the suggestion he was stealing. A black United Church minister speaks of the challenge of trying to offer pastoral care in a hospital only to be met with: “I don’t want to talk with you. I want a real chaplain.” The black valedictorian for the class of 2020 at U of T’s Faculty of Medicine was greeted the day before her graduation with the Tweet: “I would never let her treat me.” Then there are all the stories of racialized people being asked where they are from; if they respond with a place in Canada, they are then asked: “no, where are you really from?” As we were reminded during a recent United Church workshop on racial justice, stereotypes give rise to prejudice which accompanied by action leads to discrimination which with the addition of institutional power becomes systemic oppression.

When the stories of racialized people are heard, when individuals and organizations listen, things can shift. As Spiritual Directors International points out in their last newsletter:

Listening is not a passive response to the crisis we now face. It is, rather, an urgent and necessary action, and one of the most potent tools at our disposal to begin a process of remediation, change and healing. It can provide the wisdom and understanding to see a way forward through taking action that may rectify, rather than intensify, the divisions in our societies.

When people speak out against racism, and injustices in our society, when action is taken be it police hugging protesters, praying with them and taking a knee to honour George Floyd or a hockey player donating \$50,000 to a Go Fund Me campaign for Floyd's daughter, a contribution matched by the NHL, things can shift.

As Marianne Williamson reminds us in her poem, "Our Deepest Fear":

You are a child of God.

Your playing small
Does not serve the world.
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking
So the other people won't feel insecure around you.

You are all meant to shine,
As children do.
We were born to make manifest
The glory of God that is within us.

It's not just in some of us;
It's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine,
We unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.
As we're liberated from our own fear,
Our presence automatically liberates others.

Thanks be to God who names us co-creators and entrusts us with responsibility
as guardians of our planet. Amen.