

Gladys Gifford, ALP

February 12, 2012

South Park United Presbyterian

Sixth Sunday of Epiphany

Romans 8:18-23, 35-39

Psalm 95

John 3:16-17

Psalm 8

A Valentine from God

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord our strength and our Redeemer.

[this is an interactive sermon; please be ready to write your responses on the paper valentine in your bulletin]

Did you see the full moon, early Thursday morning?

It was sailing, perfectly round, just above the horizon at seven a m.

I ran to catch it on camera, upstairs and downstairs, in and out the front door,
as it shone through the lattice-work of bare tree branches.

I knew this was a rare opportunity, and I had to catch it and share it with others.

A moment of joy.

A valentine from God.

Two weeks ago, Alvin and I were in Sanibel Island, Florida, for a vacation.

The weather was fine, the beach available, the people friendly.

We saw lots of birds--pelicans and gulls and sandpipers and herons and ibis--
but the most special were a pair of frigate birds,

soaring high on warm thermals.

Frigate birds are very large, do not swim, and can stay aloft

for a week at a time-- and are found only in the tropics.

An osprey-- a sea eagle-- flew nearby, warning the frigate birds to stay away.

We watched from the beach, totally amazed.

A moment of delight.

A valentine from God.

Have you received such a valentine from God, recently?

Please take a moment, and write down your experience on the paper valentine.

Let's take a look at our children.

When my granddaughter comes over for a weekend,

we love to do cooking together and to read good books aloud.

But sometimes, I have to simply sit back and look,

for I know that her childhood won't last.

These times with our children and grandchildren must be cherished, now.

A moment to treasure.

A valentine from God.

Have you noticed such a valentine from God, recently?

Please take a moment, and write about your children on the paper valentine.

Now, I dare you....

take this paper valentine and scribble on it! wad it up! tear it in pieces!

What? you don't want to do that?

You don't want to deface or destroy the valentine from God?

Of course not.

But this is what we are doing, every day

to the valentine God gave to our care, planet Earth.

We could talk all day long about the damage humans inflict on creation,

but let's focus on one area-- the air.

We need clean air.

I could not have seen the moon on Thursday, if I were in China,

because the air pollution there is so bad.

Frigate birds live in the air; children breathe the air.

We all require clean air, for health and safe living.

So what can we do?

We want to honor the valentine from God,

a sign of love, a sign of our covenant relationship with God.

But we feel so powerless, in the face of such large problems.

How can we fix the damaged valentine from God?

There is hope, a lively hope.

For as the gospel reading says,

God so loved the world-- the cosmos-- that God sent Jesus among us.

And as Paul says in the letter to the church in Rome,

we are Spirit-led in a covenant of love, together in community.

The more we live by the Spirit in this community,

the more we become known as children of God.

And as children of God, we nurture and protect the great gift from God,

this beautiful and fragile creation.

We can do something to ease the pain of our suffering Earth!

What would be something special,

what sort of Valentine would Mother Earth appreciate?

As individuals and families, we can

plant a tree, avoid using the car,

conserve energy at home and at work and at church.

And together we can write and call and email our elected officials

to take actions in our neighborhoods and our city and our country

that will clean up the air and reduce pollution.

What a great way to honor our God, the creator of this good earth!

What an inspiration for us, to send a valentine to our God!

Please write, on the paper valentine,

two actions you will take to care for creation.

Take a moment to look at all of your responses on this paper valentine.

Did you notice the connections between our children and our earth?

Jesus taught us to love God and neighbor.

Paul teaches us that our neighbor includes all of creation.

I dare to say that our neighbor also includes

the generations of children that come after us.

We have a moral obligation to care for creation,

for in so doing we extend God's good creation to the next generations.

Paul says that the earth

is groaning, aching, laboring, waiting with us for God's redemption,

when God's people come out in public

to declare the flowering of God's kingdom here on earth.

The writer of John's gospel says

that God so loved the cosmos that God sent Jesus as redeemer,

bringing life to all,

not to condemn the whole of creation

but to save all of the world, including humans and creation,

from death and destruction.

So here's the crux of the matter:

what are we doing,

in response to God's good intentions for all of creation?

Shall we care for all of creation?

Or shall we seek the kingdom for ourselves alone?

Let us learn from the Spirit.

The Spirit is our strength, our power, dwelling in our hearts.

The Spirit of God, incarnate in us, teaches us what to do
as we embody the coming Kingdom of God on earth.

The spirit of resurrection, of the risen Christ, propels us forward,
teaching us, showing us how God's good creation groans with us,
yearning for release from bondage, hoping for new life.

It is this spirit, the Spirit of Christ,
which moves us to include care for our groaning earth
within our life together as the people of God.

And the Spirit give us the courage to identify ourselves clearly,
to say out loud:
"We are followers of Jesus Christ!
and as followers of Jesus Christ,
we care for the Earth because this is God's good creation."

As part of our Christian identity,
let us share in all the efforts to heal the earth,
to relieve the groaning of creation
and rejoice in the beauty and bounty of this wonderful world.

So, are you ready and willing?

Ready to take action?

I brought this valentine to you today as part of a national effort
by more than 1,000 congregations across the country
to raise up one area of concern-- clean air.

If you like, you can sign a postcard today that I will then gather
and send to our Senators,
urging them to oppose efforts to weaken or delay enforcement
of the Clean Air Act.

We will distribute the postcards during the offering,
and then you can hand them to Gary and me as you leave.

As Paul says, the earth groans and suffers,
waiting for deliverance from bondage and decay--
waiting for the children of God to wake up and accept responsibility
for planet earth.

Come along with me.

Celebrate God's gift to us, this incredible valentine!

Take time to care for creation.

for this is an essential part of the joyful work of the Kingdom of God.

Let us rise up

and be the people of God in this place,

who seek justice for creation

because we delight in the wonderful valentine sent by God:

our planet Earth.

Amen.