

**John 20:19-31; Easter 2A – Earth Day Service; 4/23/17**  
**Pastor Ellen Schoepf**

**(Pastor Ellen):** Earth Day Sunday is a day to celebrate God's creation. When God created the world, God blessed it and called it very good. In today's gospel, Jesus reveals himself to Thomas. God is continually revealing God's self to us. As we celebrate the Creation God has given us, we find God is revealed through the beauty, power, abundance, and mystery of the natural world. Through wind and flame, water and wilderness, creatures and seasons, God is continually present and active in the world.

**(Jack Dingedine):** The Earth and **all** that is in it belongs to God. As Christians, we are called to celebrate and **care** for Creation. Cultivating and caring for the land and the sea is central to God's first job description for humans. We were commissioned to do this work, wisely caring for the world in which we live. Just as ancient stewards managed the household resources of their master, we must wisely manage the abundant resources of God's Earth household. Caring for Creation is a **core value** of the Christian tradition. This commissioning to care for the Earth is embedded in the Bible from the start, framing our understanding of who we are as people of God. The two Creation stories of Genesis reveal a clear job

description for humans: grow families and communities, care for the Earth as a just ruler would care for his kingdom, and till and keep the land.

**(Warren Heilman):** Humility and justice were to characterize human dominion, human care for Creation. The land was to be held and worked for the good of the community and Creation. Humanity could secure abundance and peace by following God's **rules** for Creation as stated in Leviticus: "Faithfully obey my laws, and I will send rain to make your crops grow...your harvest of grain and grapes will be abundant that you won't know what to do with it all. You will eat and be satisfied, and you will live in safety."

The many interconnected systems of the natural world allow life on Earth to flourish. The health of humanity hinges on the health of the Earth. However, the health of the Earth is currently in jeopardy. Ecosystems are becoming less and less able to provide the things all creatures require to survive: clean water, clean air, food sources that are resistant to disease, and stable conditions for growing food and building homes. As we celebrate God's Creation, we must also **commit ourselves** to discovering **new** ways to incorporate Creation care into our homes, churches, and communities.

**(Tula Ngasala):** The gospel lesson for today reminds us of the human desire to see, touch, and experience the reality of God made manifest in the world. God entered into our human experience through the person of Jesus Christ. Like us, Jesus was baptized through water and received sustenance from the Earth. He took the water that is a reminder of God's first covenant with the Creation in Noah's story and turned it into wine, something that symbolized the blood of the new covenant. Water is essential for life. No living being on planet Earth can survive without it. It is a prerequisite for human health and well-being as well as for the preservation of the environment.

**(Tammy Heilman):** God sent us Jesus out of great love for the cosmos and great love for this world. As followers of Jesus, we need to remember that God did not send Jesus first and foremost to turn people into Christians. God sent Jesus to cultivate in human beings a deep love of God, neighbor, self, and Creation. Earth is our home place in Creation. We share this Earth home with people of a variety of faith traditions and people with no faith tradition at all. As Father Richard Rohr observes, "We all breathe the same air and drink the same water. There are no Jewish, Christian, or Muslim versions of these universal elements" – or, we might add, no Hindu, Buddhist, agnostic, or atheist versions. Followers of Jesus

are to be courageous enough to call to account **anyone** degrading our Earth home and open enough to partner with **anyone** intent on caring for our Earth home. In responding to the ecological crisis, we do not have to seek out great tasks. We can focus on whatever tasks God presents to us in our given time and place – in **our** home place. Whatever the task, we need to bring a passionate love for the whole Earth community to it. That passionate love is essential in the work we do as we care for Creation.

*(Ellen Holste):* The sacraments of baptism and communion use the Earthly elements of water, grain and grape as a means of communing with the Divine, sharing God’s abundant physical and spiritual resources with all who seek them. These sacraments serve as a means of unifying the community of faith, grounding it both within the physical world and in a vision of God’s realm of peace and justice. Through them, we become **empowered** to celebrate and share God’s resources. Scripture gives us an understanding that the Earth is the Lord’s. Earth’s resources do not **belong** to humans, but rather to **God**. When we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” we recognize that the bread serves not only to **sustain** us, but also to **empower** us to serve others. As people of faith, we are commissioned to care for God’s gifts in ways that ensure all have what they need, for both present and future generations.

**(Natalie Dingleline):** There are voices across the ELCA calling for a reformation of the church to encompass care for **all** of God’s good creation. This year we are celebrating the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. As we celebrate, we have been encouraged to consider embracing a New Reformation, an Eco-Reformation. This anniversary provides an opportunity for all of us to draw upon our rich Lutheran heritage regarding creation, to model care for creation, and to infuse the church itself with an eco-justice reformation. Ecological justice for the entire Earth community is not an add-on, not one more cause, not just for those who happen to be interested in it. Rather, caring for creation is an essential dimension of our love of God and our love for all our neighbors in this Earth community. Ecological justice is integral to our faith.

**(Cecelia Kramer):** When talking about Creation, Martin Luther wrote, “God writes the Gospel not in the Bible alone, but also on trees, and in the flowers and clouds and stars.” While best known for his theological work concerning grace through faith, Luther also held the materializing vision that describes the “new heavens and new Earth” as the consummation of Creation. Luther spoke of the immediacy of God in nature when he wrote, “The power of God is present at all places, even in the tiniest tree leaf.” So, as a community of faith, a community of people

who believe that **all** of Creation praises the Creator, we commit ourselves to become more deeply involved in Creation care as an integral **part** of our faith and love for God and neighbor. For the human family, our home is the Earth, the environment that God the Creator has given us to inhabit with creativity and responsibility. Amen.