

**Creation Care Sunday** Reading: Romans 8:19-23 09-03-23

By the Rev. Karen Faye Siegfriedt; St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Atascadero CA

“If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.” *(Exupery)* And likewise, if you want people to nurture and care for the earth, just don't fill them with facts and use scare tactics to motivate them. Instead teach them to connect with nature and recognize the sacredness of all of creation, for there they will find God.

Today is creation care Sunday. It is the season of the year when the Church reminds us of our responsibility to be good stewards of Mother Earth. As the people of God, we must work together on behalf of all creation, by changing our attitude, our lifestyles, and our irresponsible materialism that are causing the warming of the earth and oceans. Because of this, biodiversity is being lost at a rate not seen since the last mass extinction, some 65 million years ago, during which the dinosaurs were wiped out of existence. Unless we act now, future generations (along with most developed species) will be in grave danger of no longer existing. The future of this planet is up to us. Now is the time to act!

We just viewed an 8 minute video on the causes of climate change and possible solutions that are available to us now ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-D\\_Np-3dVBQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-D_Np-3dVBQ)). Science has given us the knowledge we need to proceed in a positive direction. Unfortunately, knowledge can only inform us. It will take action to save us. We can no longer afford thinking that the world revolves around human beings and all their worldly desires. Becoming a good steward of Mother Earth requires sacrifice and thus is a spiritual issue requiring a spiritual solution. It is into today's context of global warming that we read Paul's letter to the Romans: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.” *(Rom. 8:23)*

To groan is to make a deep inarticulate sound in response to pain or despair. When a thing or an inanimate object groans, it makes a low creaking or moaning noise when pressure or weight is applied. There is a lot of groaning going on in our world today, especially in connection with environmental disasters. Folks along the eastern coastlines are groaning from the destruction by hurricane Idalia. The people of Canada are groaning as they fight multiple fires across the land. Farmers in Europe are groaning as they face record high temperatures that are killing their crops. Californians are groaning as insurance companies drop their home insurance policies because of the drought and fires that threaten the state. The people in the Far East groan as their villages are flooded and destroyed by rising water levels.

And it is not only ourselves who groan, but “the whole creation has been groaning together.” The glaciers groan as large chunks of ice crash into the water due to melting. The emperor penguins in the Antarctica are groaning because the ice cap is melting, making it difficult to reproduce the next generation. Hundred-year-old trees groan as the fires consume them. The deer, the birds, the insects, and other wildlife groan as their habitats are being destroyed. The fish in the sea, the coral reefs, and many marine mammals groan as the temperature of the oceans continue to rise. The great apes of Southeast Asia groan as they face extinction from the deforestation of their habitats caused by climate change. The ground on which crops once grew, groan as the soil becomes more parched. What is going on here and is all this groaning justified?

Some biologists suspect that we may be living through the sixth major mass extinction. Earth has witnessed at least five previous mass extinctions when more than 75% of species disappeared. Mass extinctions are episodes in which a large number of plant and animal species become extinct within a relatively short period of geologic time. Past mass extinctions were caused by extreme temperature changes, rising or falling sea levels, and catastrophic events such as huge volcanic eruptions or an asteroid hitting Earth. We know about them because we can see how life has changed in the fossil record. The largest mass extinction event happened around 250 million years ago, when almost 90 percent of land and ocean species went extinct. This is known as the period of the “Great Dying.”

The “good news is” that in spite of these 5 massive extinctions, planet earth survived. The “bad news is” that it took millions of years to recuperate. The “good news is” that the oceans and lands recovered. The “bad news is” that many plant and animal species did not. The “good news is” that the cockroaches will probably survive global warming. The “bad news is” that we as a species might not. What are we to do?

Part of the problem is our tendency to separate ourselves from nature, believing that we are at the center of the universe and thus privileged to use the natural order for our own desires, even if it risks the well-being of the environment. We seek after bigger, better, faster, and more, failing to reduce our carbon footprint by refusing a more simplified lifestyle. If we are to make any headway with saving the planet, we need to reconnect with all living matter, groaning with empathy when they are suffering.

So when you see plastic containers floating around in the water, open up your heart and groan for all of the sea creatures who are at risk. When you learn about the rising sea levels that flood coastal communities, have empathy for those who are being displaced and groan with those who have lost their livelihood. When you hear of famine in Africa and see the desertification of previous fertile ground, groan with those who are going hungry and send money to those charities who help feed the poor. When you see fires destroy hundreds of acres of land, groan with those who have lost their homes along with the wildlife who have been burned to death. And overtime, that authentic groaning might motivate you to make sacrifices in your own life by reducing your use of fossil fuels.

As the saying goes: “If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.” (*Exupery*) And likewise, if you want people to nurture and care for the earth, just don't fill them with facts and use scare tactics to motivate them. Instead teach them to connect with nature and recognize the sacredness of all of creation, for there they will find God. “For no part of creation is left void of God: God has filled all things everywhere.” (*St. Athanasius*)

So in that spirit of connecting to the sacredness of creation, I would like to end this sermon with a meditation on a simple plant. In just a few moments, you will receive a succulent known as an *aeonium haworthii*. Originally from the Canary Islands in North Africa, this species is drought tolerant and grows well along the warmer California Coastlines, even in Morro Bay! Take this rosette in your hands and feel its waxy leaves. Smell its odor. Our sense of smell is not strong enough to detect an odor as in the fragrance of an old English rose. Notice the red borders along the edges of each petal. If you look closely, those edges are slightly serrated. Hold the wooden stem and spin the rosette around, looking carefully at its details. If you are brave enough, run your tongue along the top of the petals; they have been washed. There is no obvious taste, although the texture is similar to the skin of an unripe mango. Simply breath in the beauty of this very simple plant and give thanks to God for this small part of God's creation. Take this succulent home and plant it in your garden. Nurture it and watch it grow. Then practice this type of meditation with other parts of nature as part & parcel of your prayer life. As you connect at a deeper level, you will find yourself caring for the earth as a mother does her children.

“O God, because in our ignorance and selfishness we so often fail to care rightly for your Creation, mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may soften and unite our hearts with all living creatures who suffer. You have shown your glory throughout your creation, calling it very good: Grant us the fullness of your blessing, that we, stewarding your garden, may become partakers in your joy; through Jesus Christ the Wisdom of Creation, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. *Amen*”.



**Aeonium Haworthii**