

For All the Earth

Psalm 24

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Ladera Community Church

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Earth Sunday

The earth seems younger there, up north in Alaska. Still rough edged and raw, snowy mountain ranges rising up from the sea, dipping to glacier cut valleys, pristine and spectacular. Few highways, few people. Wildlife everywhere. Visiting my sister Janis there, we've seen moose grazing beside the road, a black bear teaching her cubs to fish, baby eagles with shaggy legs stepping out on the edge of their high nest and jumping, jumping, jumping practicing for take-off. In Homer we woke up to the sound of whales just yards offshore in a deep channel, blowing – whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, as they surfaced and dove. For the beauty of the earth, of the sea and of the sky, indeed.

Last year's Sabbatical trip there granted me the joy of officiating at a wedding for a young couple from Nondalton, the native Athabascan village where my sister had lived and taught for 10 years. On the edge of Lake Clark, Nondalton is a small village only accessible by plane. No cars, only dogs and boats and snowmobiles and such for transport. Since the wedding was in Anchorage many folks from the village had come out to the city to celebrate. Including Gladys, the matriarch of the village. She'd been surrogate mom to my sister, caring for Janis's daughters while Jan taught school. Gladys came along on a scenic drive we took one day from Anchorage up to a nearby mountain pass. All the winding way up along the river to the snowy peak, Gladys made running commentary *Oh, look at those berries there. There are plenty good berries there. I'll come back, get us some berries.* A little farther. *Oh look at that wood, so much good wood there. Me and my daughter, we'll come back and get some wood, plenty of it. My*

tourist eyes saw only scenery, her native eyes saw an abundance of available resources.

Later I spoke with Gladys son Craig. He told me about climate related changes out in the village. Folks there rely on hunting and fishing for sustenance, and the changing climate is affecting the caribou herds, who now stay up at higher elevations, their numbers diminished. Access has gotten harder. Finding a good buy on meat at the grocery store isn't an option; there isn't one. And the carbon emissions shifting the climate aren't coming from this native village, but a whole continent away Yet in Alaska, glaciers are rapidly melting, resources of land and sea affected, and it's those living at a subsistence level whose lives and livelihood are threatened.

The Earth may be the Lord's, and given into our keeping, but as tenants we're at risk of losing our lease. Spin the globe, and climate change circles it all. Weather extremes now effect even temperate climates, floods and fires, droughts and deluges make for increasing numbers of what are now called climate migrants. And those disproportionally effected by climate change are the ones who have the least to do with the carbon emissions contributing to its cause. This is especially true for parts of Africa. Increases of about 0.9 degrees in both sea temperatures in the eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean and air temperatures in eastern and southern Africa have meant greatly reduced rainfall.¹ Three years now of drought along with regional violence have dealt deadly blows to the Sudanese people. In South Sudan, according to IMA World Health, more than three million people have been forced to flee their homes, and almost 5 million men, women and children are at immediate risk for starvation, and nearly 7.5 million people need humanitarian assistance and protection.² As Mary

¹ ucc.org "UCC Sends Assistance to South Sudan and Other Countries"
http://www.ucc.org/news_ucc_sends_assistance_to_south_sudan_other_african_countries_03282017

² IRIN news 02.06.2017 "How much worse are African Droughts because of Man Made Climate Change?"

Schaller Blaufuss, team leader for the UCC's Global Sharing of Resources observes, "Every number is a name of someone with a story and a family, with life hopes and dreams and in crisis, those stories change course dramatically."³

The numbers are hard to hear, harder still to comprehend. With famine, now declared in South Sudan, three other countries Somalia, Nigeria and Yemen teeter on the brink, which means that twenty million people could face starvation within the next six months. Imagine. Imagine children you love crying out in hunger and thirst, and having nothing, nothing to give them. A newscast showed a reporter interviewing an African child. *Have you had anything to eat today? Head shake no. Have you had anything to drink today? Head shake no.* International aid officials warn this is one of the biggest humanitarian disasters since WWII.

Love your neighbor, Jesus said. And who is our neighbor? The disciples replied. Each person impacted by this crisis is a child of God, each with a story and family, each our neighbor, our brother and sister in Christ. Love for neighbor, care for creation, these go hand in hand, and ask not only our compassion, but our willingness to make changes and sacrifices in order to preserve and protect life. Now is the time to realize that we are both stewards and students of creation, called to prudent use of natural resources and a generous sharing of our personal resources to help those in need. Now is not the time to drastically cut foreign aid from the federal budget. At less than one percent of the federal budget, foreign assistance is some of the most impactful money our nation spends.⁴ Now is not the time to deny the science that tells us climate change is real, happening, nor is it time to deny that we have a part in it, and by this refuse to acknowledge we can help alleviate the effects. Now is the time to support science and technology in searching out

<https://www.irinnews.org/analysis/2017/02/06/how-much-worse-are-african-droughts-because-man-made-climate-change>

³ ucc.org loc cit. 3/28/2017

⁴ ucc.org loc cit. 3/28/2017

innovative answers to environmental problems, now is not the time to back away from climate agreements with other nations but to join with global partners to provide sustainable energy solutions.

As one handheld sign said at yesterday's Science March in SF "Science knows no borders." So too, humanitarian help, compassion and relief must know no borders. Borderless too, the understanding that yes, while each of us by our level of energy consumption contribute to the problem, together we can commit to lighten our carbon footprint, to make changes that, one by one, can add up to make a real and ultimately life-saving difference.

So in celebrating this Earth Sunday, yes, along with the Psalmist we affirm that the Earth is the Lord's, Alaska, Africa, all of it...this brilliant, blue and green and ice capped planet we call home, along with all that lives and breathes upon it. What if we, along with others of all faiths around the world, were to act like it? Treat the earth and the amazingly complex web of life she sustains with reverence, humility, and gratitude? Yes, we offer prayers and thanksgiving, and even more, we commit to act. We pledge to take action, and we take up a special offering to provide relief and food to our brothers and sisters, and children in Africa. And we urge our legislators to enact a budget that reflects moral and compassionate values, to protect the environment, to save lives, to relieve suffering. As a beaming child and his friend held handmade signs together at yesterday's march, one said, "We are not resisters. The other: we are transformers." May it be so.