

Joyful Transformation

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For parents who bring young children to worship, is this the anxiety that you feel? Like, *Please don't cry. Don't embarrass me?*

Theologian Gordon Lathrop talks about worship as a kind of reorientation, and the word orientation has that root orient, which comes from the east. So, to be able to situate—to orient ourselves—is to situate ourselves based on where the sun rises. For Gordon Lathrop, the points of the compass that we should be directed to, first off, is to God. That is why we come to worship: to be reoriented, directed first towards God, then to be directed to one another here in this assembly, to be directed out in the world to those in need, and to be directed to all creation.

I don't know if you remember it, but when the iPhone first came out it had a compass on it. Sometimes it wouldn't work very well—since it was living in your pocket and going through all kinds of weird motions—so in order to use it, you would turn the app on and then make a little figure eight motion. Every time, you'd have to do this; resetting the compass anytime you wanted to use it.

In a way, that's what worship is like. We've been out in the world. We have all these pulls and demands, all these things crying out for our attention. And we come back here, and we reorient ourselves towards those compass points that God has told us to pay attention to. Especially now that we're in the

season of Easter for the next couple of weeks, we reorient ourselves towards the rising sun because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We know what we are directed towards.

In my first year of seminary, I got to do a J term class up at Holden village. Our professor took a group every three years to learn about how the seasons of the church year are connected to the seasons of creation. I had never thought about it, but it makes a lot of sense if you imagine how weird it would be for Christians in the Southern hemisphere to celebrate Christmas—the light coming into the world—right around the darkest time of the year. Or if you can imagine them celebrating Easter this past week—new life and resurrection—deep in the late fall. It's a little weird, right? The seasons of the church year have been designed to point us towards creation.

If you've never been, Holden is extraordinary. I highly recommend it. It is so extraordinary that my senior year, when this J term class was offered again, I tried to finagle a way that I could go again. My professor, Ben Stewart, was kind enough to let me do an independent study and come along.

Now, when you do an independent study, you have to come up with your own project. You can't just do a PowerPoint of *I Love Holden*. (Trust me, I asked). It turned into kind of a capstone for my environmental emphasis. In my reading and research, I realized I had all the information from the previous class about how the church year is connected to these seasons, but I wasn't really able to use it. Creation doesn't show up in the liturgy or the readings very often. It's like we're saying, *Oh, creation, that's an outside thing, but worship, this is an inside thing.*

Right? Creation is an animal/plant thing, but worship: that's a people thing. They're separate.

But in our readings from today, God is very concerned about the whole rest of the planet. And in our gospel today from John, we hear about how all things came into being through Jesus Christ. Not one thing—**not one single thing**—came into being without him, and what has come into being through him was light. And the light was the life of all people.

I think if John went a little further, he would realize that life is the light of all creation as well. When we hear how Jesus says that Jesus is present in the least of these, we know that Jesus is also present in those parts of creation that are in need as well. Those parts of creation that are crying out in need of healing. We hear in our Psalm, how all creation is called to praise God, to praise the one who made it. How mountains and valleys, creatures, plants, all of them are called to praise God, the maker. And in Exodus today, too.

I think it is extraordinary the number of times that I read in our liturgy about how God saved Noah and his family. There's a whole arc full of animals that came along, too, but we don't talk about them; I guess they're a little afterthought. God didn't tell Noah to bring a whole arc so that the people had something to eat later on. God told Noah to bring clean and unclean animals, edible and inedible, animals that had no use to Noah. God asked Noah to bring them because God loved them. God wanted them to come along.

We hear how God's promises are for all creatures. How God says, *I will make this covenant with all living things from now on*. That charge that we hear so often, in the very beginning where God tells humans to go forth and multiply. God tells the animals to do that as well. God's hope for all creatures is for flourishing.

God calls us to love the world that God made, the way that God loves us. Not just because it is good and useful to us, not just natural resources, but because God loves it.

We need clean water so that we can drink it and baptize with it, ***and also*** for the sake of the water itself: a thing that was created and loved by God.

We need animals so that (*don't listen, Ginny!*) we can eat them, so that they can help us, ***and also*** for the sake of the animals, themselves beings who are part of God's saving plan.

We need plants so that we can breathe, so that we can make things, ***and also*** because they came into being through Jesus Christ.

We need the earth because we literally cannot live without it, ***and also*** because the earth and everything on it is a member of our worshiping community praising the Lord.

So now that we know that, now that we've reoriented ourselves again: *what do we do?*

And that is the really, really hard part.

I could jump in again to the argument about personal versus corporate responsibility. You know, *if we all do our part* versus *the grim knowledge that a hundred corporations are responsible for 71% of global emissions and any action we have is a drop in the bucket*. But if we don't act who will? We could go back and forth on that.

But then we get paralyzed by shame and overwhelmed by the enormity of it all, the knowledge that anything we do is too hard, but also not enough. So I want to free you from that today. Instead, on this creation Sunday, I want to offer it an invitation: to you, to this assembly, to this community. It is an invitation to Joyful Transformation, to consider today and always: *what if we lived like we truly believed that God's salvation is for the rest of the planet, too?*

What if we believed that God's love is for every creature, and that God hopes for reconciliation among all of us?

What if we remembered, as we go about our lives, that we were made to praise the Lord alongside every single creature, plant, and thing that we share this planet with?

What if we could see Jesus Christ, the word of God, present in all things that have come into being?

What if we could join our lives to the global work of healing and reconciliation that God is already doing among us?

There's a lot at stake, and so much to do, and not a lot of time to do it in. It's easy to feel discouraged.

So this morning, I wasn't quite sure how to end this sermon on a less depressing note. Then early this morning, I woke up to Birdsong even before the sun rose.

While it was still dark, they were ready for a new day and we can be, too.

Let all creatures praise the Lord.