

The Rev. Beth Hilkerbaumer  
April 26, 2009  
Green Faith  
The Third Sunday of Easter  
Genesis 1:26-28, 31; Romans 8:18-25

Green. It is a color created out of a mixture of yellow and blue.

Historically, when we refer to something being green we think of the color green. But lately this word has meant more than just a color in a box of crayons. We've heard things like: going green, a green economy, the green party, living green. It's no longer just a color anymore, is it? This word speaks to a kind of mentality and way of life. We use this word "green" to talk about being environmentally conscious and it is an ethic to live by these days. As I'm sure some of you know this past Wednesday was Earth Day... a day to celebrate God's creation. When God created the world, God blessed it and called it very good.

This past weekend we've had some nice spring days, including a few spring showers, and I saw several people around the neighborhood, including a great group working hard right outside these doors yesterday planting or weeding. It is the time of year where the earth begins to

come alive again. We begin to see colors and after a long winter it is a good sight to see...even with all the allergies it brings. And although I enjoy looking at Spring I don't care much for having it in my hands. So on Wednesday, Earth day, my first thoughts went to my Uncle Benny. Now some of you have heard me talk about Missouri, the little country church where my dad's family attended, and that it is literally out in the middle of nowhere. Out there at my aunt and uncle's farm, 25 miles from the nearest town, is where I feel the closest to God's creation. I remember as a young girl walking with my uncle around the farm and him telling me about the crops and the animals, how to tell when the sweet corn was ready. My Uncle Benny had an appreciation for the earth that comes from working with it all the time and fewer and fewer of us work with the earth in that way. Working the earth was who he was right up until he died. He taught me that we need to take care of the earth in order for it to take care of us. We are just one part of the many interconnected systems of this world. The health of humanity hinges on the health of the earth and my Uncle believed and lived by that.

“Going green” has become very popular over the past couple of years and the trend expands from the food we eat to the places we live to the transportation we take to the products we use. One would think that it’s a new idea. It is not. Care of creation is at the core of our Christian tradition. In Genesis God charged humanity with the responsibility to care for what God had created. But it is a call that we so easily put on the back burner and as a result our world is suffering. We have thought little about what we can give the earth and only about what the earth can give us. We have cared more about convenience and success than what is best for the environment.

Since it was Earth Day this past week I have heard a number of stories on the news about what people did to raise awareness, read articles, and have seen some astounding statistics all of which point to the issue that we need to do a better job of taking care of creation. Being the movie lover that I am I was reminded of the movie that came out last year *Wall-e*. This movie depicts a world where trash is king, where our wasteful habits and our desire for more, bigger, and expansive things have driven us from the earth. There is so much trash, so much litter, so

much waste, that there's more of it than we could handle. It is a projection of what the world could be like if the pattern of care doesn't shift.

Paul heard the groans of creation. He wrote: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves...". In this section of the letter to the Romans, Paul writes about life in the Spirit and a future glory and also of the present where the creation is groaning.

The reality that Paul experienced over 2000 years ago is even truer for us today. The earth is groaning. Melting ice caps! Disappearing rain forests! Air pollution! Waste dumps! Global warming! Toxic water! Endangered species! The earth is groaning. So what can we do? The problem seems so big and overwhelming. With the weight of the problem so evident this past Wednesday I was reminded of a fable I heard. A man was riding through the jungle on his donkey when suddenly the donkey stopped. There was a little bird lying on its back in the middle of the path with its legs sticking straight up in the air. "What do you think you're doing," asked the donkey. "Holding up the sky,"

replied the bird. The donkey laughed, he-haw, he-haw, at the little bird. Then he said, “You can’t do that.” The little bird thought and said, “I start where I am and do what I can.”

I want to add this morning to the mix of “green” sayings with, “Green Faith.” It is a term I heard last month when I attended a lecture by Diana Butler Bass, who has studied a number of churches across denominations on what is working in the churches. Green faith is more than just recycling or turning off your lights when you’re not using a room...although those are very good things to do.but it’s about having a regenerative faith. God calls us to have a faith that grows, a faith that is contagious and spreads. I read an article in *Sojourners* magazine about a woman that shows us what having “green faith” looks like. Her name is Majora Carter and she is a native of the South Bronx of New York City. In 1997 she found herself living back at home with her parents. Unsure of her next step in life she heard about plans to build a waste transfer station in her community and there she found her calling. She organized a group to fight the building of this transfer station and won. Since that time Carter has founded a nonprofit organization dedicated to building a

sustainable green economy in the South Bronx by bringing back trees and grass. Carter's passion for a green economy in her neighborhood has spread way beyond what she ever imagined back in '97.

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. The book *The Lorax*, by Dr. Seuss is a powerful tale about the importance of taking care of the environment. It is about the sad Once-ler who long ago destroyed a beautiful area of land in order to make lots of money. The Lorax is a creature that lived in the land the Once-ler was destroying. The Lorax tried to warn the Once-ler that he was hurting the environment, but the Once-ler was greedy and did not stop to take care of the land. Now the Once-ler wants to tell everyone not to make the same mistakes that he did. The Lorax says; "I am the Lorax. I speak for the trees. I speak for the trees for the trees have no tongues."<sup>1</sup>

Green faith is a faith that grows and extends to people and creation. But, we don't articulate our faith enough. Our reformed

theology is going to shrink if we aren't good stewards of this faith.

Brianna, baptized today, needs our excitement in order to grow to have a faith that is alive and worth investing in. Our neighbors, our co-workers, our friends, who are struggling, need our energy about this faith. Green faith is a faith that has passion, a faith that enlarges. As Christians, we are called to celebrate and care for creation. We must wisely manage the abundant resources of God's earth. As we celebrate God's creation, let us also commit ourselves to discovering new ways to incorporate the care of creation into our homes, our churches, and in our communities. To quote Dr. Seuss from *The Lorax*: "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."<sup>1</sup> My hope is that we all go from this place with green faith and that it may grow and spread.

---

<sup>1</sup> Theodor Seuss Geisel, *The Lorax* (New York: Random House, 1971).