

Restoring Peace With Creation

In the name of God the Creator, The Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

The gospel I just read is called the “parable of the dishonest manager.” If you can understand it and interpret its meaning, then congratulations. If not, then join the myriad of people including scripture gurus and theologians who throughout the centuries have had a hard time understanding exactly what Jesus was getting at in his parable of the dishonest manager, the crooked manager! The parable’s meaning has stumped even the best and most creative interpreters of Scripture. Hold that thought. We will return to it a little later.

But first, welcome to our annual Season of Creation celebration at All Saints, which today is even more special because it is September 21st, which has been designated as Sun Day (that’s two words!). You will notice that our bulletins are little different, Molly having devised the icon of the Sun. Today is a worldwide day of action and celebration of the power of clean energy, a celebration of our life-giving star the Sun, which offers us the power to clean up the environment. It provides for us a way to reverse the devastating effect of the burning of fossil fuel and the climate change it is causing. Today is a day for honoring and protecting this God-given created world out of which we are born, in which we find our home, and of which we are a part, just like every other created thing. Barbara Brown Taylor calls this creation a “luminous web” within which we live and breath and have our being. All things are connected, all part of one whole. In her book An Altar in the World she beautifully makes the point that the entire world is sacred, that we can find God in all of creation, probably more so in the great outdoors than within the walls of any church. We must protect this sacred space. We are called to help heal it. The sun itself is available for such healing. It is the stimulus for a clean energy revolution: we have the technology to harness its energy; all we need is to build the political will to make clean energy accessible to everyone. Why was September 21st chosen as the

day? First, because it is the solar equinox—one of two days of the year when the axis of the Earth is no longer tilted toward or away from the Sun, so that the northern and southern hemispheres get an equal amount of sunlight.

Incidentally, although most of the world won't be able to see it, there is also a partial solar eclipse today, as the moon passes between the Earth and the Sun. And second, because today is right before the UN General Assembly's annual meeting, giving us an opportunity to send a message to the US and other world leaders about the urgent need to accelerate and scale up the transition to clean energy.

There are several clean alternatives to the burning of fossil fuel for our energy needs: Solar, wind, hydropower, geothermal, nuclear, and bioenergy sources such as hydrogen and ocean energy. These are referred to as “clean” or “low-carbon” because they don't directly emit green-house gases like CO₂. These sources therefore help to improve air quality and mitigate climate change. Today we focus on the solar energy provided by our star the Sun. Why solar energy? Here are a few quotes. From environmentalist Bill McKibben: “We now live on a planet where the cheapest way to produce energy is to point a sheet of glass at the sun. This isn't ‘alternative energy’ anymore—it's the common sense obvious path.” From the former EPA administrator Gina McCarthy, “It's time for all of us who know that windmills don't cause cancer and that not all energy comes from deep underground, to stand together with our kids and grandkids on Sun Day to stop the mind-numbing rhetoric and jumpstart our clean energy transition.” From the Rev. Lennox Yearwood Jr. “No one hoards energy from the sun and wind; billionaires and fossil fuel executives can't hold it in ‘reserves.’ It's energy for everywhere and everyone.” And from marine biologist and author Ayana Johnson of the book that our own Gulf Coast Creation Care has been reading What If We Get It Right, “We really could get it right—we have the clean energy technology we need, and what we need now is the human energy to

make it happen despite the obstruction of Big Oil. That's what Sun Day is about, harnessing photons to power our lives."

The transition to clean energy is happening across the world. California is showing how a big state can power itself without fossil fuels. Texas broke its solar, wind, and battery records in one spring week. Ranchers in the state of Washington have turned to a new crop: solar power. Reaching "net zero" carbon emission is getting easier and cheaper in the UK. Pakistan has had a "solar boom" by using cheaper Chinese solar panels, creating a bottom-up energy revolution that could become a blueprint for energy transition worldwide. As Bill McKibben wrote in the "New Yorker" a few years ago: "In a world on fire, stop burning things." People are acting across the country and across the globe, but sadly the powers that be in our state Alabama are making the transition to clean energy difficult. In a few minutes you will hear from Rhoda Vanderhart about how we can act today to take our case to the Public Service Commission here in Mobile.

The Season of Creation is an annual celebration running from September 1st through October 4th, which is the Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology. The season was first celebrated in 1989 and is now a worldwide ecumenical celebration calling all people to come together to care for our common home Earth. It is a time for repairing and restoring our relationship with God and with all of creation—the worldwide church family invited to pray, protect, and advocate for God's creation. Each year has a new theme, and the theme for this year is "Peace with Creation," inspired by these words from Isaiah 32:14-18: "For the palace will be forsaken, the populous city deserted...until a spirit from on high is poured out on us, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field...then justice will dwell in the wilderness...the effect of righteousness will be peace...quietness and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places." What a beautiful vision—justice, secure dwellings and peaceful habitation: peace with creation.

This passage challenges us to reflect on our role in healing a world harmed by the environmental destruction and conflict and injustice we are now seeing. We hear a lot from this pulpit about social justice. What we are addressing during the Season of Creation is the dominant social justice issue of our time. It is the mother lode of social justice, the issue that affects all of the other social justice issues we face. That issue is climate change. We are seeing it all around us now: the heat, the fires, storms, melting ice caps and sea level rise, instability of our weather patterns, displacement and migration of millions of people. Much of what we are seeing started with the Industrial Revolution which began back in the 1760, the age of industrial manufacturing. That's only 265 years ago, a millisecond in terms of how long Earth has been here, over 4 1/2 billion years. Climate change is happening quickly. Can the Earth sustain life as we know it with this pace of change? What can we do to reverse this change? One thing we can do is to stop burning fossil fuel, and begin using clean energy, which brings us to our focus today—Sun Day—to our star the Sun, to its potential to reverse this unsustainable change. Theologian and environmentalist Gus Seth said this, “The main threats to the environment are selfishness and greed and pride. And for that we need a spiritual and cultural transformation.” Yes, caring for God's creation is a spiritual and moral imperative. In choosing to live our lives with respect and care for all of life we are choosing the way of love, of justice, and of righteousness, those same things Isaiah said nearly three thousand years ago.

Let's go full circle now and return to our parable of the dishonest manager that we heard today. This past Tuesday I was sitting at the dinner table with Cynthia and our daughter Natalie trying to decipher what Jesus was trying to say with this parable. Not only that, but how could this parable about a crooked manager have anything to do with caring for creation? With celebrating our star the Sun and the energy it can provide? Cynthia said “Why not just go to the last line? I think it may be saying something you could preach about. Here is the last line again: “You cannot serve God and wealth,” or as Eugene Peterson

translates it in The Message, “No worker can serve two bosses: He’ll either hate the first and love the second or adore the first and despise the second. You can’t serve both God and the Bank.” Absolutely, I said. In our care for creation we are serving God. In our search for clean energy sources such as solar we are serving God. We are acting out of our moral imperative to do what is best for creation including our home Earth. It is in resisting the transition from fossil fuel to solar and other sustainable energy sources that we are serving the Bank. That is where the big money is made. That is where the deep pockets, the “reserves” are stored, the cost of which is determined by those in power deciding how the most money can be made. It is greed. The powers that would prevent us from moving to clean energy sources are serving wealth, not God, or as Peterson puts it they are serving “the Bank.”

I will conclude today with this translation of the words of the psalmist: “O Lord, send us forth with your Spirit to renew the face of the earth, that the world may once again be filled with your good things: the trees watered abundantly, springs rushing between the hills in verdant valleys, all the earth made fruitful, your manifold creatures—birds, beasts, and humans—all quenching their thirst and receiving their nourishment from you once again in due season.”

And we give thanks for the Sun, as Saint Francis puts it in his “Canticle of Brother Sun,” “Praise for the sun, the bringer of day, he carries the light of the Lord in his rays; the moon and the stars who light up the way unto your throne.” Amen.

Rev. Bob Donnell