

Darkness Shall Not Overcome
First Presbyterian Champaign / Windsor of Savoy
Earth Sunday / April 24, 2022

During the season of Lent, I had several conversations with friends about the state of the world. They were here at church seeking hope because the world just seemed so much. So dark. Hope seemed so elusive.

Turning on the news at any given time, I am reminded of the old news adage, "If it bleeds, it leads."

News of:

- gun violence
- social media and damage to young people
- insurrections and the latest things politicians say
- water rationing in California and Arizona
- rising fuel prices and grocery prices and the hunger associated with both
- wars and missile test launches
- nuclear weapon threats
- bird flu hitting the state of Illinois
- vanishing species
- global climate change, just to name a few

It just all can seem so dark and hopeless.

As I write this on Earth Day, I find my inbox full of messages about what the world needs now. How food insecurity and climate change are linked.

It feels so very dark

And yet.

Scripture can remind us of hope.

Today's passage from Genesis is a favorite passage of mine. It reminds me, frankly, of my mother. My mother was the most positive person I have ever known. She looked continually for the good in all circumstances. I remember as a kid that whenever the rain stopped, she would send us running out the door and

to try to catch a glimpse of the promised rainbow. Whenever on one of our family road trips, she would be checking out the sky, and having us look for patches of blue sky and rainbows to indicate that the weather would be good for camping that evening. Rainbows are such a symbol of hope to me. God setting God's bow, a weapon of war, and resting it in the clouds as a reminder of God's covenant with people, every living creature including the birds, domestic animals and every living animal on the earth – to not rain destruction on the earth again.

Looking a little further back in the book of Genesis, we hear of the creation story. Of God doing what is deep in God's nature, creating:

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "let there be light" and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. (Genesis 1:1-4)

And a few verses later in the first chapter of Genesis:

And God said, 'Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.'" And it was so. (Genesis 1:14-15)

Light was so important, that we hear more about light in those first few verses of Genesis. Light provides us life. From photosynthesis to warm, light is necessary for life. God created the light. And it was good. The creation stories Genesis reminds us of essential truths. And we know deep in our bones how light is indeed good. Darkness can feel quite the opposite; it reminds us of disorder and chaos.

Sometimes, the world can feel a bit like it is again full of chaos, at least if we watch the news too much.

Yet if we look at these early verses of Genesis, we are reminded of the *goodness* of creation, and God brings order out of chaos and light over the darkness.

Today's gospel passage is John's creation story.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. This light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1:1-5 NRSV)

While this language is beautiful, it also reveals a deep mystery of God. While my scientific brain would love to understand how it all happened, I have to remind myself that scripture is not so much about science, but rather a way of explaining about God and God's nature. It is one thing I learned studying scripture as an adult.

As a *child* of the church, I came to faith by singing in the cherub choir.

Often, as I spend time preparing for worship, I come up with lines of songs that preach far better than any words I could share:

377 I want to walk as a child of the light
I want to follow Jesus
God sent the stars to give light to the world
The star of my life is Jesus

In Him, there is no darkness at all
The night and the day are both alike
The Lamb is the light of the city of God
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus¹

I guess I learned a thing or two about being a positive person from my mother. Because for me, faith in Christ Jesus evokes feelings of light; the light of my life is Jesus.

This hymn is based on the First letter of John, which reads:

¹ "I want to walk as a child of the light" by Kathleen Thomerson hymn 377 in [Glory to God](#) hymnal

⁵This, in essence, is the message we heard from Christ and are passing on to you: God is light, pure light; there's not a trace of darkness in him. (1 John 1:5 MSG)

This time of year, it is the light that renews my soul. Last summer I made the trek to spend many an early morning with the fields of sunflowers. Throughout the last few weeks and Holy Week in particular, I got up before the sunrise to walk amongst the cherry trees at the Japan House. I wanted to be there when the sky changed color and the sunbeams hit the tender blossoms on the trees. That low, long-angled light is just spectacular, especially as the temperatures warm and we glimpse new life in the tender shoots. Being in nature restores my soul.

Washington Post environmental columnist opened her piece on Earth Day with this:

If hope had a color, it would be the pale green of a newly sprouted seed. It would smell of pollen and damp earth. Its shape would be the swanlike arc of a stem stretching toward the sun.²

This season of Easter, where we are reminded of the new life in Christ, spring and all its new life can bring us a sense of joy.

But we also have a responsibility.

The Message version of the Genesis tells us:

God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature
So they can be **responsible** for the fish in the sea,
the birds in the air, the cattle,
And, yes, Earth itself,
and every animal that moves on the face of Earth."
(Genesis 1:26-28 Message)

² Sarah Kaplan, Washington Post, 4/22/22

Responsible for the fish, the birds, the cattle and Earth itself. Responsibility has a very different connotation than dominion or dominating. We are indeed responsible for the earth.

One way our congregation has taken on this role, is as an EarthCare congregation for the last 10 years! We do several things around the church to be good stewards of the Earth.

- Reusable coffee cups
- Bottle-filler drinking fountains
- Highway cleanup
- Recycling
- Styrofoam collections
- Electronic newsletters
- Pollinator gardens

Talk to one of the environmental committee members to find out how you can contribute to this effort and make our corner of the world a bit better.

Renowned primatologist Jane Goodall wrote:

Our earth needs care, though every day.

"You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you.

What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make. - Jane Goodall

How can one little person be responsible?

But maybe that is not the question.

Maybe it is instead, how can I help take care of my little corner of the world?

What can I do, to be faithful to God and be responsible for the earth? To be a child of the light?

If your email box is anything like mine, I imagine you got lots of ideas from Friday's blasts.

The thing I read over and over as perhaps the most important thing to do is to talk about it. Talk about caring for the earth. Share that you do indeed care for the planet.

Beyond talking though, I have a few ideas:

- Do something
- If you are going to drive, combine trips, keep your tires properly inflated, and if in the market for a new vehicle, seek out one with the highest miles per gallon you can find, or even go electric.
- Get outside – spend time in nature, experience God’s creation.
- Practice Plogging – Plogging is a term invented by Erik Ahlström referring to **the act of picking up trash and litter while jogging**. It is a portmanteau of the Swedish term plocka upp, which means "to pick up," and jogging. (so bring one of those garbage bags with you as you walk!)
- Get your produce locally and eat seasonally...and stay for the Education hour and hear from Sola Gratia
- Plant some flowers: at back of sanctuary are seed paper hearts that you can soak overnight, tear the paper up a bit, then plant with a sprinkling of top soil. Later this summer you will be gifted with wildflowers.

Siblings in faith, the events of the world may seem dark, especially if you spend any time following the news. I believe God is full of light, and frankly is the light. God is creating still, breathing new life and new hope into the world around us. We are called do our part to tend to the world given to us by God and on loan from our children.

Let me conclude with a poem by the Rev Sarah Speed, who wrote much of the liturgy we used this Lenten season.

The earth doesn't deserve the sun.
We pollute her skies and poison the air.
And yet, day after day,

She keeps coming back.
Day after day, she warms my skin,
Lights the night, and draws me in.
I think that's what Easter feels like.
We haven't earned love,
And yet, love couldn't stay away.
The stone had to roll,
The dawn had to break,
Love had to win.
So each morning I thank God for this tiny glimpse of Easter—
Light that breaks through the night,
Love that can't stay away.
—"Easter" by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

Let us pray:

Gracious, fantastic God, you have brought us from darkness to life, out of death into life. Kindle within us the light of your love and your peace, that we might be to others bright beacons of blessing in a world grown dim. In the name of the True Light, Jesus the Christ. Amen.