

Proper 17, Year B
September 1, 2024

Season of Creation

Why are we here? on this earth, I mean. At some point, not long ago, it became a not so uncommon form of protest to seek a divorce from one's parents: I didn't ask to be born; I didn't ask to be a member of this family; if I'd had a choice, you would never have been my parents, declares a 17 ½-year-old. I do not intend to make light of the reality that there are families where individuals who somehow find themselves parents are so ill-equipped that their offspring are neglected, abused or in immediate danger of losing their lives; and folks whose lives continuously take a wrong turn, through no particular fault of theirs, who ask the question "why was I born?"

Why are we here?

Genesis says God created us to tend the earth, to be stewards of and have dominion over every living thing, to subdue the earth; the Lord put man into the garden of Eden to till it and keep it, and to name every living creature. James Weldon Johnson says in his poem *The Creation*:

God walked around, and God looked around
On all that he had made.
He looked at the sun, and he looked at his moon,
And he looked at his little stars;
He looked on his world with all its living things,
And God said: "I'm lonely still."
Then God sat down –
On the side of the hill where he could think;
By a deep, wide river he sat down;
With his head in his hands, God thought and thought,
Till he thought: I'll make me a man!

So we are told: we were formed out of the dust of the earth, out of a lump of clay to care for God's creation and to be with God to prevent God from feeling lonely. Perhaps unbeknownst to us, in the bargain God graced us

with God's own yearning to care for something or someone "Other." How often have we learned that the fastest, most effective way to pull ourselves out of our deepest despair is to reach out and help someone else.

We were born to care.

Imago Dei: is this the Image of God we puzzle over? All this time, I thought it was gender, color, political affiliation, religious stance, tribal loyalty: God is a man; God is a woman; God is gay; God is straight. God is a straight, white male who has been and always will be an Episcopalian.

God cares. God loves. In God's image, we were born to care, we were born to love. It's that simple. It's that complex.

That would help explain our confusion, our profound sorrow, our sense of how did we get here? where do we go now? what comes next? in these days of extreme divisiveness. It feels as though the world rejects our God-given desire to care. The God within us weeps.

God within us. If you love me, keep my commandments and I will be in you as the Father is in me.

I believe we are created to house God on this earth: the tabernacle of God, the dwelling-place of God is with mankind, we hear in the Book of Revelation. Over the centuries we have demonstrated pretty clearly that we pass over the God-within-us in favor of ourselves, that we are the default rather than God. God sent his son, Jesus, to show us how to house the God-within-us, to show us what it means to be "in the world, but not of the world." Jesus lived and died as one of us; he was tempted as we are but did not sin. Ezekiel chapter 47 describes the living water flowing from out of the temple of God, that living water which if we drink, we will never thirst again. This living water Jesus offers to us. If we creatures of God are in fact God's dwelling place, God's tabernacle on earth, it follows that those springs of living water also flow from us, that we have the ability to refresh and replenish the earth, that we can give life to one another, to all of God's creation.

I've got peace like a river in my soul.

I've got joy like a fountain in my soul.

I've got love like an ocean in my soul.

The gift of life. The gift of yearning to care for the other.

God's gift of life and love comes without strings attached, but because God also gives us the gift of yearning to care, our response to God's generosity is "how can I give back; who can I help when so many are in need?" During this Season of Creation as we focus on how to better treat all of God's creatures, we are presented with some answers; we can

- be more aware of how products are packaged before purchasing
- when out walking, take a container for collecting bottles, cans, etc
- begin to look at options for our next automobile
- consider "upping" the percentage of our waitperson's tip
- wonder is it really more cost effective to shop at COSTCO than to keep a Mom and Pop store alive
- think about who is my neighbor?

We all have answers to how can I give back, who needs my help. The Season of Creation is a time for us to transform our ideas into action, to become more intentional: the time to be good stewards of God's gifts and become more aware of how precious our existence on this earth is.

Why are we here? Why were we born? We are here to companion with God and to care for all of God's creatures.