

*This sermon was preached by Creation Care Alliance of WNC Director, Sarah Ogletree at The Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration in Saluda, North Carolina, on Sunday, October 17th, 2021. The sermon text is Psalm 104:1-9, 24, 35.*

Psalm 104 tells of the beauty of God's world, of the relationship between Creator and Creation. In this passage, fire is named as God's minister. The water serves the Lord. The wind is God's messenger. All creatures, all beings, all aspects of Creation are intimately known by God and held close to God's self. God's body, imagined here by the Psalmist, is covered by light and wrapped in water. God's works are manifold, branching infinitely from the Tree of Life. And Psalm 104 celebrates that life as well as God's wisdom in creating.

This passage is moving because the relationship between God and God's works—God's Creation—is *right*. God is in right relationship with what God has made. The water listens to God's voice, the wind carries God's words, the sunrise plays off of God's form. Creator and Creation are in harmony...

But not all of Creation. Though the water is listening, the people are not.

We, members of Creation, *creatures* ourselves, have too often forgotten our role in the world. Our role declared in Genesis as stewards of this garden. Our role declared in the gospels as lovers of God and our neighbor. We have forgotten our charge of caretaking, and in our apathy and our amnesia, our actions have caused great harm.

Take the water. The water called forth by God in Psalm 104 and set in boundaries to prevent death and mass flooding now floods communities at rates beyond anything we have ever known. This is a result of our actions, our consumption, our endless burning of oil and gas, our stubborn refusal as a culture to change, our attempt to be in control.

And I get it. Control is seductive. We tell ourselves that if we're in control we don't have to worry. That if we're in charge, bad things won't happen... And so we hold tightly to the notion that we have it all figured out.

The problem is, we don't. And we won't.

We are not in control. We cannot "ride on the wings of the wind" like God in Psalm 104. We cannot *control* Creation, we can only exist *within it*. We can only be creatures in the world, of the world, formed by God and called to right relationship. We can only be beautifully and wonderfully *human*.

Friends, what would it mean to be human again? To stop acting as if we are in control and instead honor God's Creation and take our place within it? What would it mean to commit to our calling as creatures? To value love above expediency and personal comfort?

Christian theologian Walter Bruggemann says that we cannot become what we cannot imagine. And so, with the help of teachers listening deeply to Creator and Creation, I want to imagine with you today.

Sherri Mitchell, Weh'na Ha'mu Kwasset, of the Penawhapskek Nation is one of our teachers. Through her words and her works, she offers incredible lessons for our journey of remembering who we are and walking in our purpose. In her essay "Indigenous Prophecy and Mother Earth," she acknowledges that "[h]uman beings have fallen out of alignment with life... [and] as a result, have forgotten how to live in relationship with the rest of creation..."

But all is not lost.

Indigenous ways of being continue to steward the land and protect the water. Though indigenous peoples make up only 5% of the global population, land managed by indigenous people holds approximately 80% of the world's biodiversity and 40-50% of the remaining protected places in the world. Our indigenous siblings have proven that the presence of people does not inherently lead to destruction. Instead, people can exist as valued parts of a healthy and thriving ecosystem. People can live within their means and their place.

This is *good news*.

With generosity, Sherri invites us to learn from her community—to consider the groundings of her culture and how these firm foundations have prevented her own amnesia and apathy in relation to her identity and the world. She speaks of "kincentric awareness," the knowledge that every aspect of Creation is connected through kinship networks—that our ancestors include the trees, and the rivers, and the 2.3 million species that share fragments of our DNA.

She speaks to the concept of *enough* within her traditional language, explaining that while one word, "mamabaezu," refers to individual needs meaning that "he or she has enough," another word, "alabezu," means "everyone has enough"—including all beings in the natural world. In stark contrast to the values of western culture, Sherri declares that in order for there to be enough, there must be both *mamabaezu* and *alabezu*. Enough for the entire Earth community, for the fullness of Creation, for me, and for you.

She presents a definition of well-being that is communal—in which the health of *one* depends on the health of *all*. A definition in which the relationship between all beings and their Creator is both honored and acknowledged. A definition that seeds our imagination with possibilities of how the world could be—*how the world has been!* This is how our communities can be shaped—

how our forests can be seen for more than their timber, or palm oil, or land upon which to graze cattle.

Can you imagine? Can you imagine a world defined by *enough* instead of excess or scarcity? Can you imagine living like our health, and the health of the Ash tree, and grandmother, and monarch are connected? Because they are?

Truly, I want us to imagine it. Close your eyes if you have to. Take a deep breath. It's important that we are able to envision a world that is different. It's important that we are able to imagine who we could be, who we're called to be—and to remember that it is possible for us, once again, to become who we are.

We have unlearning to do. We must unlearn ways that place profit before the lives of all our relations, our neighbors—human and non-human. We must unlearn value systems that do not take into account the well-being of all people, species, and places. We must unlearn ways of relating that are not rooted in relationship. We must unlearn distraction, and like the water in Psalm 104, listen again to our Creator.

Friends, we have been connected to Earth from our beginning. The Hebrew word for human, *adam*, comes from the Hebrew word for soil, *adamah*. In the second chapter of Genesis we learn that God forms us from soil. We are *adam* from *adamah*—quite literally “soil people.” We are creatures of Earth—connected to God, and land, and all beings.

This is who we are.

And once we remember who we are, *we get to be who we are*. We get to live into our callings. Perhaps slowly at first, muscle memory takes time... But we get to *live fully*—from love, for love, with love, by love. We get to stand with all of Creation, as a part of Creation, and join in its groaning. We get to be a part of the awakening of God's people.

And people are waking up.

This past week, thousands of people led by indigenous leaders marched on Washington D.C. They marched for clean water, clean air, and action on climate change. They marched to demand a beautiful, compassionate, and sustainable future for their children and their children's children. Hundreds were arrested as a result of their nonviolent civil disobedience—faith leaders from various traditions among them.

In just two weeks, the UN will gather for COP 26—a series of potentially monumental climate talks in Glasgow, Scotland. Today, people of faith all around the world are praying for that gathering. They are praying for courage and for spirits of cooperation. They are praying for

boldness. They are praying for justice. They are praying for deep kindness. They are praying for eyes that see and ears that hear...

I invite you to join in that collective prayer, and also, to call your elected officials. Invite them into the work of imagination that we have done today. Encourage them to listen to the still small voice beckoning them toward a more loving way. Because a more loving way *is possible*. We have done it before. We can do it again. We have been molded by God, with Earth, for this purpose.

Beloved, now is the time to remember who we are. Now is the time to *become* who we are. Now is the time to walk the path of right relationship. Now is the time to be in community with Creation, *within* Creation.

May there be enough for you, and for me, and for the trees, and the rivers, and the salamanders, and our grandchildren, and their children, and all of us.