

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

This is My Father's World
Based on 1 Kings 19:11-12

Today we celebrate the beauty of the earth, and all that is in it. Our prayers have been spoken with images of sun and light and colour and delight, of:

"Rocks and trees, of skies and seas, His hand the wonders wrought"

as the hymn goes. As the grass grows thicker, and the first of the spring flowers poke out of the ground to welcome a new season, it seems fitting for us, to drink deeply of that beauty which surprises us each day.

There are those, though, who see the imagery of this day as fluffy nonsense, which distracts us from the serious business of worship, and being challenged by The Word. They might suggest we read Genesis 1, and move on.

There are those who will see similarities in our prayers today, to what we call Celtic Spirituality, the legacy of the Father Patrick, who used the things before him: the sky, the soil, the wind and fire to describe a journey with Christ to folk who lived simply in simpler days. Thanks to places like Iona Community across the pond, and our brothers and sisters

of the Roman Catholic tradition, we have these prayers and images today.

There are those who will hear in our celebration of the earth, a familiar rhythm to prayers we often say when we honour the Indigenous peoples of our country. Oddly enough, though, I am coming to understand that perhaps these prayers have missed the mark; they are what we non-Indigenous peoples think, the First Nations want to hear in prayer; that in fact, their relationship to Mother Earth resonates much more deeply than that.

There are those who will use this day as a means of protest, a cry of justice for the ways corporate greed and laziness, and inattention to the future are misusing limited resources; of climate change, of oil disputes, of the lack of food for children around the world.

There are those who will see themselves this day, to be activists for the future; for alternative energies, for deep space probes to find life elsewhere, for redistribution of wealth, for the rise of philanthropy from those who have so much, in contrast to those who have so little.

There are many agendas on Earth Sunday that extend far beyond:

"The morning light, the lily white, which declare their Maker's praise."

The matter of the earth is a big one, with big choices, and big consequences. This is our home. This is all we have.

But perhaps your days of hiking Mount Kilimanjaro are over. Perhaps your dream of travelling down the Amazon River to see the Salto Angel waterfall in Venezuela has come and gone. Perhaps your goal of landing a probe on Mars is in your past. Other than reading a few warm and fuzzy prayers, what does Earth Day really have to do with you, here and now, in your comfortable pew, or later today in your favourite chair with the warming sun on your knees? Perhaps you are thinking too big.

"In the rustling grass I hear Him pass, He speaks to me everywhere."

Earth Day is not just about big things: the tallest mountain, the deepest gorge, the biggest volcano. Elijah was running from, and searching for, God, all at the same time (ever been there?) He searched in the big things: the powerful wind, the monstrous earthquake, a scorching fire. But where did

he find God in the end? In the silence. In the small and quiet moments, he found what He was looking for.

We look for God in our lives in the big moments. We call upon God for the big events. We cry out to Him in big crisis. We shake our fist at Him in the midst of big change. Often, we do not hear Him, because we are so caught up in the 'bigness' of the moment. But God is not only found in the big stuff. Our faith and our life experience have taught us that. But when is the last time you looked for God in the small things: the purple hues of the crocus, the buzz of the honeybee, the rich colour pattern of the ring necked pheasant as he struts across the field, trying to impress a mate. When was the last time you stopped, and drank deeply of the beauty of the golden sunset, or the sparkle

of the snow capped mountains, or considered the mysteries of sea and space? When was the last time you stopped to listen to the giggle of small children in the next yard, thought carefully of the interconnectedness of humanity, or the ability of the earth to heal itself when given time and care. When was the last time you listened to the silence?

Yes, Earth Day is an important reminder that there are vast, wonderful, and grand things in this world. Yes, there are many problems we have created over the centuries, but also many discoveries that have benefited us, all from this same earth. Yes, there are agendas, and justice issues, and disharmony, and imbalances of power.

"That though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet."

But let's not lose sight of the small picture: the small moments of beauty, the small victories, the small glimpses of wonder and delight. Let us not forget to make room for the mysteries of life, the pauses in the day, the silence of contentment. Earth Day, and every day, God can be found, whether you are on a dug out canoe on the Amazon or sitting in your amazing Lazy Boy. In the end, there is only one thing to drink deeply in this conversation:

"This is my Father's world, Oh, let me ne'er forget."