

God revealed in creation.

Psalm 23; Revelations 7:9-17

In *A Song of Faith*, a recent United Church creedal statement, we proclaim the following: “Each part of Creation reveals unique aspects of God the Creator, who is both in creation and beyond it.”

I was remembering the day that I learned what the word *panentheism* meant. It’s a fun word, isn’t it? Panentheism. The Greek literal translation means “all in God”. Panentheism: all in God. Now according to Jurgen Moltmann, who is a systematic theologian, it means that God is in the world and the world is in God. So everywhere we look, no matter who we are, God is with us. So we proclaim further in the creedal statement that “each part of creation reveals a unique aspect of God the Creator, who is both in creation and beyond it. All parts of creation, animate and inanimate, are related, and all creation is good. We sing of the Creator who made humans to live and move and have their being in God. In and with God, we can direct our lives toward right relationship with each other and with God, and we can discover our place as one strand in the web of life.”¹

The Season of Easter truly is a journey of discovery for a new way of living our faith in the world. The question for us today is this: how will we rediscover our interconnectedness with all of Creation? And then further, how will this discovery change our lives and our ways of living so that once we acknowledge how we are interconnected, we will realize and then make decisions based on the fact that our actions affect all other living beings, both animate and inanimate?

Have you ever noticed how most of the major religions understand life through observing nature? We hear of many gods that are based on parts of Creation. For example, in Greek, we know that the goddess Gaia is the personification of the earth, of all Creation. Pontus is the God of the sea. In the Polynesian culture, there is Kane, who is the god of Creation and sky, and Pele, who is the goddess of fire and volcanoes. You get the idea.

In Christianity, we have one God who created all things. We know this from the first Creation story in the Bible: we hear which day God made which parts of nature, including humans. It

¹ *A Song of Faith*, The United Church of Canada Creedal Statement, 2006.

ends with the statement that humankind has the responsibility to care for all of God's creation. And, like many things in Christianity, we haven't always lived up to what we were supposed to do, and so when we see the Word, "We have dominion over all of creation", we can often get into trouble thinking that we can make choices based on what is best for us, instead of realizing that God's understanding is different from our own. So, the United Church, in 1986, added in a line in *A New Creed* that said that we are called "to live with *respect* in creation." Not to dominate over, but to live with respect.

Psalm 23, as you all said so beautifully today, is a psalm that is very familiar. It's familiar because it's often used at funerals. When we do, the focus of that particular psalm is that God is always with us, shepherding us from life into death into eternal life, is anointing and healing us with oil, and we will have all that we need. As I read this psalm again this week from the perspective of Creation instead, the line that stood out for me was one that I often look over really quickly. The line was: "I shall not want". *I shall not want* is a statement of trust. It's a statement that says, "I trust in God." "Living out of a fundamental attitude of trust is counterintuitive and often countercultural in modern Western cultures. To say with the psalmist, "I shall not want", directly challenges all the advertising that is designated to create a need that a particular product can satisfy."²

This promise – this promise of trust, that we shall never want, is also echoed in the vision that John had in the scripture from Revelation, where it said, "They will hunger no more, and thirst for no more. God will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Until we recognize and accept and live that we are interconnected with all things, we will continue to seek power, and to see things from our own perspective, our own personal wants and needs. John's vision in the passage from Revelation reveals how many illusions we do have. Both about our own power, and about what God owes us, by seeing that no harm comes our way. We need to figure out a way to separate reality from our illusions. God has not promised that our lives will be free of suffering. God has promised us that we will feel healing. That we will find strength and courage, and that *we shall not want*. So how can we work at healing the earth? How can we live so that our lives are not destroying all of Creation, but instead healing?

I found this quote quite illuminating this week, and it said: "The single biggest thing I learned from an Indigenous elder of Cherokee descent, Stan Rushmore, who reminded me of the difference between a Western settler's mindset of 'I have rights', and an Indigenous mindset of 'I have obligations'. Instead of thinking that I am born with rights, I choose to think that I am born with obligations to serve past, present, and future generations and the planet herself."

² Catherine L. Kelsey, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 2, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 432.

God has called us to care for all of God's Creation. We, as Christians, have obligations. We are in a covenant with God; we are in partnership. And thus, we must care for *all* that God has created – not just ourselves, our friends and our family. So if we remember that we believe in Panentheism, that God is in everything and we are in God, then we can look to the scriptures to discover what this means. God begins the teachings in Genesis, saying that we are to care for the Earth. And then God goes on to teach the Hebrew people after they were saved from slavery on their journey to the Promised Land, where God said, "I will provide you with what you need, but only take what you need this day." We don't need to hoard; we don't want to waste all that has been created. Think of the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand, where there was just a few loaves of bread and a couple fish. And yet, not one was left hungry, because people came in the spirit of abundance and sharing. They shared what they had with others, and only took what they needed. Just think about how church potlucks work – I know it's been a few years. But isn't it amazing how you can come thinking, "Oh, this isn't going to feed enough people", and yet there is always leftovers. There is always enough for all people.

What God, I think, is teaching us today and reminding us in Psalm 23 is that we are called to pray. And our practice of prayer is a call to be still, to refocus and to remember our connection with all people. We are called by God to live a Sabbath life, which means joining in the cyclical nature of life. That with everything, there is a rhythm. There is a time for everything. There is a time to work and a time to rest. There is a time when the land will give us so much abundance, and there is a time where the field needs to lay fallow. Ebb and flow, give and take. So we need to shift our thinking; we need to refocus our attention on how we are connected. Shift our thinking to truly live the statement, "I shall not want." Instead of saying, "I want, I want..." how will your life be different if you say to yourself over again, "I shall not want." I have everything I need. I trust in God and all that God has created.

For you Star Wars fans out there, you might think of it this way: we are called to be one with the Force. In one of the more recent movies, we hear one person walking through this battle saying, "I am one with the Force; the Force is with me." And in fact, the Jedi are not seeking out conflict, even though they've got these great light sabers. The point of their faith and their tradition is to be still, to meditate – their training is mostly meditating, and being at one, and understanding their connection with all living, breathing things.

So how will your actions change if you stop thinking, "I really want this." As it says in Psalm 23, "My soul is restored when I walk beside still waters." How will your faith, your belief in God, your belief that God is in everything and in you make you make decisions that will affect others in a way that is not harmful? What is the one thing in your life that you could change right now that would acknowledge this interconnectedness with all of Creation?

Just to tie up my Hawaii trip: as I was about to go snorkeling, there are beautiful signs now that remind people that most of our sunscreen can harm coral. That we need to be mindful of that. And it's not just that this one person is going in there; it's this one person plus a thousand others every single day on this earth that are going in and poisoning the coral. So I did find sunscreen that was reef safe. I have to tell you, I looked like a ghost – I mean, I normally do, but it was even worse – because of the products in it. But I didn't care, because what I was doing was a choice that would allow the coral to breathe and live and provide beauty and shelter for all of Creation. What is the one thing that you are going to do this week that will help to care for and live with respect in Creation as God has called us? And remember: I am at one with God; God is with me. I am at one with Creation; and all Creation is with me. We give God thanks for all that has been created.