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Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
Larkspur, California  
April 22, 2012  
Earth Day

Psalm 98; Romans 8:18-28  
"Sea Life"

It is not every year that Earth Day falls on a Sunday. This year it does and so this entire service links our faith with Earth Day.

I was ordained in 1985 and accepted my first call in Riverside Presbyterian Church, Jacksonville, Florida. A member of the church, Mary De Martini, was the city's coordinator for the Earth Day festivities and she arranged a sunrise service for the city at Jacksonville Beach.

It was a perfect morning. A liturgist stood upfront with the congregation facing the sea. The sun rose with soft pink and yellow hues over a silky ocean and pelicans flew across the sun.

The morning was blessed by God. If I could freeze the time and squeeze it into the entire globe I would.

My mind also goes back to my teen years when I surfed at an ideal spot on the northern KwaZulu coastline in South Africa. The place is called Zinkwasi and on my first visit I shared waves with porpoises. I glided into a clear blue wave and porpoises swam alongside me in blissful harmony.

But alas, another time I visited Zinkwasi and strangely there was white foam piled knee high on the beach and in the water. I walked and paddled through the mysterious foam to get to the outside waves. I caught my usual waves and returned to my car, towel dried and drove home. I itched for days and realized with shock that a new factory nearby was emitting toxic chemicals into the ocean.

New Testament writer Paul had an inkling of earth's corruption when he wrote to the Roman church: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies."

Paul is saying a lot more than we can claim for but it is interesting that he speaks about a decaying and groaning creation and that it waits for freedom and redemption.

Suellen and I go to the San Francisco Ocean Film Festival every year and while we experience the most glorious shots of God's amazing earth we also see annually the horrors of humanity's disregard for the earth in spoliation, pollution and insensitive fishing. Thousands of sharks are caught annually for their fins only. They are pulled aboard a ship, their fins are cut off and they are thrown back into the ocean to die a slow and painful death.

I have the program of this year's film festival. I'll take it to the Fellowship Hall. Please read the annotated versions of these amazing films and consider treating yourself to the festival next year. It is a pilgrimage for Suellen and me.

I could catalogue the decay and groaning of the oceans and sea life but since this Sunday falls on a Sunday of Easter it is better to focus on the resurrection, basically what we can do to create a sustainable and livable earth for ourselves and future generations.

First, an image from scripture and we hardly get a better image of a resurrected earth than that provided in the Psalms. Jesus was a product of the Psalms and he would consider this a resurrection passage. The Psalmist writes: "Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity."

On Easter Sunday we had resurrection in flowers. Today we have it in the roaring sea, applauding floods and singing hills. And God is in the midst of it all. There's the rejoinder that this happens as a result of God's coming to judge the earth, the world with righteousness and the people with equity. In other words, when we take care of the earth, when we seek justice for our world (called "eco-justice") and when we treat all of life with respect the sea roars with approval, the floods applaud and the hills sing with joy.

There are a thousand things we can do to protect and heal our earth and we can go online for activities. We need to be committed and creative. The best latest depiction of hard work and creativity is portrayed in the movie "The Island President" a compelling documentary about Mohamed Nasheed, until recently president of the Maldives. The film focuses on his attempts to agitate for strict global-warming rules at the Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2009.

It's an issue that obsesses Nasheed: The Maldives are a chain of low-lying islands off the southwest coast of India, and even a modest rise in the ocean level could wipe them out.

After detailing Nasheed's rise to office, the film switches to his preparations for the Copenhagen summit, including visits to eroding Maldives shorelines. Nasheed comes across as energetic and committed, and possessed of a sense of humor - to raise awareness about greenhouse gas emissions. A highlight of the film is a creative brain wave of the president: A Cabinet meeting underwater to drive home the point that unless they do something that's how they will be in future years.

To close this sermon I can do no better than read a letter to editor in yesterday's San Francisco Chronicle. David McGuire from Sausalito writes:

"This Earth Day, let's celebrate the other 71 percent.

"In the Bay Area, we are fortunate to have green open space, clean water and air and a productive ocean at our doorstep. But 40 years ago, fish were dying from industrial pollutants dumped in our waterways, rivers burned and the air in America's cities was a toxic miasma.

"Activated by millions of Americans in 1970, the Earth Day movement fought to reverse these ecological crimes. The Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act and many other groundbreaking environmental laws under the conservative Nixon administration soon followed.

"This year let's celebrate our redwood trees, our streams and open space, but let's not forget the other 71 percent of our planet: the oceans. The oceans provide more than half the oxygen we breathe. More than a billion people rely on seafood as their primary source of protein. The ocean influences our climate, our economy and our health.

"But the ocean is faced with dire threats from over-fishing, pollution and acidification caused by carbon emissions. The ocean needs our help. This Earth Day while we are celebrating nature, let's remember the majority of our Blue Planet and motivate our citizens to increase safeguards for the ocean, and for our future."

I call this sermon "Sea Life" because that's what God in Jesus wants: Life in all its fullness for the sea and the entire earth. Amen.