

The Rev. Cornel Barnett, D.Min.
Redwoods Presbyterian Church
Larkspur, California
April 24, 2011
John 20:1-18
"Eco-Easter"

We've had a perfect storm of earth and climate related events this week. It was Earth Day on Friday and the first anniversary of the BP/Deepwater Horizon oil spill on Wednesday. Storms and tornadoes lashed the Eastern regions of our country and we heard news about worsening conditions at the tsunami beaten Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan.

All this coincides with Holy Week and culminates today on Easter. Resurrection should have something to say about the precious earth God created.

Our Mission Outreach Committee has been particularly concerned about the earth and has a display with resources in our Fellowship Hall on earth care. The materials were garnered mainly at the Green Festival held in San Francisco recently and at the Ecology Center in Berkeley. Please help yourself to any item on the table in front of the display board. We thank our intern Christina for creating the display. She's in LA today.

In the Palm/Passion worship service last Sunday I mentioned that we would miss the significance of Holy Week if we jumped directly from the hosannas of Palm Sunday to the alleluias of Easter Sunday. The road to Easter passes through the darkness and death of Holy Friday. Life follows death. Life is preceded by death.

It is said that when someone dies we hold the person's death in two hands. The death itself is in the one hand and life is in the other hand, the life the person lived on earth and the life the person now lives with God. If we held death without life we could be caught in a chronic cycle of grief. If we held life without death we could be in denial of the death. So we hold the two together: life and death.

The same goes for Easter. We cannot celebrate Easter without acknowledging Jesus' death.

This might be the reason why the Easter stories begin with visits to the tomb. The men go for personal reasons and the women to prepare the body with spices for a long-term burial. We can imagine their radical surprise when they find that the body of Jesus is not there. The stories continue with the resurrection.

The message for Easter is that in Jesus life has conquered death. Death could not detain Jesus. He is risen. He is risen, indeed.

In the story today, Mary mistakes the resurrected Jesus for the gardener. "Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?' Supposing him to be

the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.'"

They are standing in a beautiful garden, good enough for there to be a gardener. It's a stretch but it's enough for me to locate the risen Christ in the garden of the whole earth. So I call this sermon "Eco-Easter."

Our Mission Committee's concern for the earth and our concern for God's beautiful world need the absolute affirmation of life signified by Jesus' resurrection for the well being and sustainability of the earth. God knows, our world needs it.

Last week we had a special guest address our monthly Saturday breakfast group. He is Alan Edmonson former seismic explorationist with Chevron who now teaches history, earth sciences and physics at Holy Names High School in Oakland. He wrote a collection of poems on the Gulf oil spill. He spoke about the spill and read his poetry. One poem is called "2010 Passion Play." One of the Marys in the poem is the same Mary who visits Jesus in the garden tomb. The other is the mother of Jesus.

2010 Passion Play

BP, another brand of Pharisee,
which purveys what is orthodox,
peddles the drug, false truth,
and jealous of its prerogatives,
wields those instruments of policy:
torture and murder.

How foolish has been our behavior
to have invited for a second time
the sacrifice by God of what is held
most precious: that which is of God
and is God.

Daughter or Son, does it matter?
You, who are called Kemp's Ridley sea turtle,
I have seen You stretched upon Your
stinking, black ooze cross
dead, and forsaken.
Who was there to watch You die?
Scourged by the black fire that lashed
Your lungs and painted Your body,
were You too scourged by the red flames
of a burning sea?

And who now will care for Your body?

The Gulf, Your dual Marys,
 would wash You clean,
 if we had not made of them
 the instruments of Your execution.

Alan says of the poem: "This poem is a lament actually; it is intended to memorialize the destruction of the Gulf's ecosystem in general (which is intricate, yet ultimately fragile despite its inherent robustness), and the cruelty of BP's methods of response as it tried to mitigate the disaster then unfolding in the Spring and Summer of 2010 (including dispersing the spill oil at depth, and burning it on the water's surface).

"The poem's provenance stems from reports of air breathing sea creatures dying after getting caught in the oil burns, performed under the Coast Guard's aegis, on the surface of the Gulf.

"The animal featured in this poem is an endangered creature that the Wildlife Service along the Texas Gulf coastline has been nurturing in an attempt to improve its numbers. The spill has imperiled this creature in more ways than one. "

The display in our Fellowship Hall shows the animals in the US that are at-risk, threatened and endangered and there's encouragement for us to do something to save the animals, indeed the fauna and flora of our world.

Christ is risen, Christ is risen indeed. That's what the empty tomb is all about. That's what resurrection is all about . It's about doing everything we can to affirm life on this beautiful planet of ours.

When Mary embraces Jesus in the story today she embraces life. While we hold death in one hand, while we face it clearly as Alan does, we also embrace life, the life we live now and the life we live with God forever. Bodily resurrection is the most powerful symbol we have of life that conquers death in this life and the next.

Resurrection encourages us to be bodily engaged in ministries and actions for life. The magazines in the Fellowship Hall and eco-care websites provide ample steps and solutions for caring for God's beautiful world. I've compiled a sampling of sites which can be picked up on the table. Please pick up the list. You wouldn't want to miss the site for "Holistic Moms" and "The Green Parent."

Jesus' resurrection encourages us to embody life in every area: work, home and community. It's one thing to have ministries of the church; it's another to minister wherever we are. How do we live with compassion and care in our daily lives? How do we connect spirit and work? A group for this purpose meets here every first Wednesday of the month at 7 pm for an hour to make these connections and for support. Everyone is invited. How do we connect spirit with home, community, play and leisure? The church is a support group for all of these things and we *are* engaged in wonderful ministries and actions.

Easter, Eco-Easter, tells us to go for it. We turn death into life. We get back to the garden. We say "Yes" to life.

We don't deny death. How can we? It's all around. We are engulfed by it. But we take hold of life like we have never done before and go about God's good work of compassion and care and we engage with the resurrected Christ – the Spirit of Life in us – to restore creation. Amen.