

Dear God, help us to listen and to pay attention to the cry of the earth. Amen.

The cry of the earth.

That's a quote from a joint statement put out this week by the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Eastern Orthodox Patriarch.

The earth has actually been crying for a long time.

It only cried softly for a while and not many people heard it.

It cried when DDT killed not just mosquitoes but everything else around them.

It cried when the Cuyahoga River in Ohio burned in the 1960s.

It cried in Bhopal, India when a gas leak containing dioxin a Union Carbide plant killed over 2000 people.

It cried at Love Canal.

It's been crying but now its sickness and grief is much louder and more intense, and we can't ignore them anymore – floods, fires, heat waves, hurricanes.

You've heard probably more than enough.

At some point the bad news just seems overwhelming and we think, these are gigantic problems. I have no idea what to do.

We try to imagine all the dire predictions actually happening and it's too much.

So instead of adding my voice to the din,

I hope today to help us refocus our energy and our beings, really, on the foundation of our place in creation,

a creation that in Genesis 1 God pronounced "good" at the end of each day

and after the final day of creation, God said that it was not just good but very good.

I'm sorry to say this but one of the causes of our environmental crisis and climate change is Christianity.

"Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism...

not only established a dualism of human beings and nature

but also insisted that it is God's will

that humans exploit nature for our proper ends."

That statement comes from a seminal paper published in the journal *Science* in 1967 by a professor at UCLA.

That paper, along with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*,

were 2 major influences on our growing realization

that humans have used and abused the natural world for hundreds of years.

In a pagan world, every tree and animal had a spirit

and before cutting down a bush or killing an animal,

humans took care to pray to that spirit and to thank the animal or bush

for giving up its life, to be grateful for what it provided.

Christian missionaries instead, chopped down sacred groves,
which they considered idolatrous
because they didn't believe that God's spirit inhabits all living things.
And that darn phrase from Genesis 1,
to have dominion over every living thing that moves upon the earth,
has fostered an arrogance that still permeates
almost everything we do and how we see the world.
But please note, God's instruction to human beings to have dominion,
and I wish I could say that dominion is a bad translation
of the Hebrew word but it isn't,
was given to humanity **before the Fall**,
when the actions of humans and God were aligned.
After the Fall, God never gave that instruction again.
The politics of environmentalism is mixed.
Incredibly, Richard Nixon's presidency oversaw
the creation of the EPA and the passage of the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts.
He however was followed by other Republicans like Ronald Reagan,
a churchgoer, who proclaimed
when you've seen one redwood, you've seen them all
and James Watt, his Secretary of the Interior,
who stated that protecting natural resources was unimportant
in light of the imminent return of Jesus Christ.
When "the last tree is felled, Christ will come back," he testified.

Since the late 1960s when it began to dawn on us that something was wrong,
it took another 20 years for so for another ground breaking work
not just to question the history of Christianity's relationship to nature
but to restore our truest foundation on the goodness and blessing of creation.
Matthew Fox, in his book *Original Blessing*,
makes the brilliant and crucial point
that the fall/redemption dynamic that has dominated Christian thinking
since St. Augustine,
replaced an earlier, more ancient tradition of original blessing.
The primal great event was not the Fall but the creative energy or Word of God.
That Word is active every minute – blessing, sustaining, empowering all life.
God of the Covenant is a God of blessing.
The notion of original sin is not only not found in the Bible,
it is a distortion of the meaning of life.
We all sin but our bodies, our beings are not inherently sinful.

They are beautiful and good and part of the fabric of the goodness of all life.
Creation is one of our holy scriptures.
“Every creature is a word of God and is a book about God.” (Meister Eckhart)

A parishioner at St. Andrew’s, Penny Ozinga,
has taught many of us about the importance of the meaning of all words,
but especially Hebrew words.
In this case, the Hebrew word for creation, *beriyah*,
is related to the Hebrew word for blessing, *berakah*,
so God’s blessing inhabits every living thing.
When we see, when we know that every plant and animal is holy,
from the potato bug to Sequoias,
we can no longer interact with the world around us in the same way.
We are changed.
When we love something we take care of it,
not out of guilt or some sort of do-gooder burden
but because we honor and value all that it means for us.
We are loathe to hurt what we love.
So we begin to consider the consequences of our actions –
everything from putting that spider in our bathtub outside instead of killing it
to turning off the water when we brush our teeth
and putting our groceries in reusable bags.
All these little steps add up to a general consciousness
which leads to actions that treat what we have been given
with the care and respect it deserves.
And as our consciousness grows,
we begin to see more ways that we can be good stewards of creation.
Once we see the goodness of all things and their interconnectedness,
we will never see the world again in the same way.

God has entrusted to humans the needs of the creation and its preservation.
We, as it says in the first letter of Peter (2:9),
are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood...God’s own people”
and because of our place in creation, we have a responsibility,
a huge responsibility to take care of it.
It’s not just an altruistic view but an extremely practical one also.
We sit at the top of the pyramid of life.
Everything underneath us is essential to our existence.
If we wipe out a species, the top of that pyramid gets a little shakier and less solid.
If the bees die out, then a whole critical link in the chain of life is destroyed.

Our place, at the top of the pyramid is precarious at best.
And are we as essential to the health of creation as the other orders?
As far as I can tell, everything would be just fine without us, better, probably.
As Hildegarde of Bingen wrote,
“Glance at the sun. See the moon and the stars.
Gaze at the beauty of the earth’s greenings. Now, think.
What delight God gives to humankind with all these things...
We are to work with nature. For without it we cannot survive.”

There was a very interesting article in the Denver Post this summer that reported that the town of Nederland, a satellite of Boulder, passed a resolution to give the 448 square mile watershed around the town “fundamental and inalienable rights”.

This means that the town will appoint guardians who will speak for nature in local decision making actions. This gives forests, mountains, and rivers legal standing. And the same movement is happening for animals. These are great examples of our growing consciousness of the value and importance of all life.

Every year it becomes more apparent that our actions really matter, to the extent that some scientists have suggested that the Holocene era which began after the last Ice Age has been replaced by the Anthropocene era, which began about 1950 when a dramatic increase in human activity affecting the planet, took off. So I pray that this liturgy of creation, our prayers and songs, will take root in us and cause us to open our eyes to the holiness and interconnectedness of all life and as our consciousness grows, we will begin to act out of our love and compassion for every being, plant and animal. And I will end with a final word from Meister Eckhart. “This then is salvation: When we marvel at the beauty of created things and praise their beautiful Creator.” Amen.