

APRIL 26, 2009  
EASTER 3  
EARTH SUNDAY  
“LIFE’S AUTHOR”

On this Earth Sunday, let us pray: Creator God, in giving us dominion over the earth and all its creatures, you commissioned us to be fellow stewards of your creation. Give us wisdom and reverence to use the resources of nature so that no one may suffer from our abuse of them and that generations yet to come may continue to praise you for your bounty; through Jesus Christ our risen Lord. Amen.

Throughout this Easter season we are focusing on the implications of the good news that “Jesus is risen” for our everyday lives — what it means for us, in the words of the poet Wendell Berry, to “practice resurrection.” Last week we considered how the early church practiced radical economic sharing, care for the “commonwealth” I called it, as a way of “practicing

resurrection.” This week, which we are commemorating as Earth Sunday, I want us to consider how we are called to live out the implications of Easter in terms of our calling to be earth-keepers, to “*touch the earth lightly*” as one of our newer hymns in ELW sings, recognizing, as we’ll be singing in our hymn of the day in our new Taiwanese hymn, that “*God who fashions all that lives, to each one a blessing gives.*”

“God who fashions all that lives” is, in fact, a pretty good paraphrase of the words of Peter in our reading from Acts who refers to Jesus, in memorable language, as “*The Author of life, whom God raised from the dead.*” I love that translation “*Author of Life*” which could just as well be translated “leader, pioneer, founder, originator” of life. Yesterday at the Festival of Books at UCLA Ruth and I heard the Pulitzer Prize-winning author Marilynne Robinson being interviewed on what it takes to be an author. I like Acts phrase “Life’s Author” especially because it highlights the originating

creativity of the One whom God raised from the dead, that same One of whom John wrote in the prologue of his Gospel: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things **came into being** through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What **has come into being** in him was **life**, and the **life** was the light of all people.”*

And so this Author of Life was himself the Creative Word of God—the “Wordsmith” of all of life, if you will—Life’s Author—whom as Peter reminded his hearers and us, *“you killed”* ... but *“whom God raised from the dead.”* And so we begin this Earth Sunday by remembering not only that God is the creator of all, but that the Word become flesh and blood in Jesus of Nazareth—the very Author of Life—has himself suffered death at our human hands and been raised from the dead by life eternal—life with a

capital “L”--by God’s death-defying creativity.

To “practice resurrection” then implies for us post-Easter people, the calling and power—the vocation—to defy all death-dealing, anti-life forces in our world on behalf of the Author of Life. Our mandate from God is to cherish the earth and all its creatures which one Lutheran theologian, Phil Hefner—with whom I spent four long years on the Lutheran Reformed Coordinating Committee a decade ago--who takes seriously both modern science and the implications of what it means for us humans to be created in the “image” of God, has dared to call our vocation as God’s “**created co-creators**”—a dangerous and daunting idea that takes with ultimate seriousness our human and God-given responsibility to care for God’s continuing creation of which we’re a part with as much God-given ingenuity as we can muster.

While our reading from Acts reminds us that Jesus himself is the “Author of Life,”

who “**author-izes**” our care and concern for the creation, our Gospel narrates the sequel of the lovely Emmaus story. It tells us St. Luke’s account of Jesus’ Easter eve appearance to his frightened disciples back in Jerusalem to which the two disciples from Emmaus had hightailed it following their encounter with the mysterious stranger who “opened to them the Scriptures” and “made their hearts burn” until “their eyes were opened and they recognized him” for who he really was “in the breaking of the bread.”

Here we see, as in last week’s account from John of Jesus’ overcoming Thomas’ doubts, how the newly risen Jesus goes out of his way to underline his materiality as a real flesh and blood person and no mere ghost or spirit. “*Jesus himself stood among them,*” Luke says, “*and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’*” again the same everyday greeting of “shalom” or “salaam” that you might still hear on the street in contemporary Jerusalem meaning simply “peace.”

But *“they were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost,”* Luke says—and I can’t help but think, an angry ghost, come back to haunt those who had deserted their master in his time of need. But, Luke says, Jesus sought to allay their justifiable fears as he asked, *“Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself.”* It’s really me, Jesus is saying. Further, he says, *“touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”*

This for me is yet another testimony to what we in fancy theological language call “the incarnation” of God in Christ that “dignifies” our humanity and that of all creation by God’s choosing to become Godself a part of the creation—and here we see not just for a brief time of Jesus’ sojourn on earth, but for all time as his resurrected body retains its humanity—it’s real flesh and blood character—even if it is “transfigured” flesh and blood. While still

“disbelieving for joy,” the old RSV translation butts it—so happy they couldn’t believe it!—Jesus underlines his point in what I always hear as one of the great all-time comic lines of Scripture that sounds to us so utterly inane and out of place, “**Have you anything here to eat?**” I hear a Jewish guy with a Brooklyn accent asking, “Can’t a guy get a sandwich around here?” A seeming non-sequitor which serves, you see, to underline the “corporeality” of Jesus, for ghosts don’t get hungry, do they? Well, do they?

But then follows perhaps the most significant passage of all, once they’ve given him a piece of broiled fish to eat which he ate in their presence, Luke bothers to tell us—probably cold, left-over fish, I always think. Having assuaged his hunger, Jesus then says, “*These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled*” and Luke adds “*Then he opened*

*their minds to understand the scriptures*” reminding them of how it was written that the Messiah was to die and rise again from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins was to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. And, what’s more, Luke concludes, “*You are witnesses of these things*” —the Greek word is you are “martyrs” of all these things.

Many of you will remember the snotty poster we used to have hanging in our old coffee lounge: “*He died to take away your sins. Not your minds.*” Friends, we have it on good authority that Jesus on Easter Sunday itself unmistakably told his disciples that he intended to “**open their minds** to understand scriptures” or as Eugene Peterson translates it “He went on to **open their understanding** of the Word of God, showing them how to read their Bibles this way.” The problem, sisters and brothers in Christ, is that too many of those who call themselves Christian—like those first disciples—aren’t willing to have their minds

opened. I'll admit, the saying is more than a little sassy and brash. And some pious folks—maybe even some among us—may at first be put off by it. But it fits: “He came to take away your sins. Not your minds.” He came to “open” closed minds.

But it does serve as a kind of warning sign to those who expect to wander into church and keep their minds closed to anything new that Jesus may have in mind for them, doesn't it? St. Paul's way of putting it to the Romans was “Do not be **conformed** to this world but be **transformed** by the **renewing of your minds...**”, words we've borrowed for our mission statement. Jesus “opened their minds” not that his disciples might be empty-headed, of course, but “he opened their minds to understand the scriptures”—how to understand and interpret the truth of those very scriptures that his disciples all knew but continued to mis-understand, as they had when Jesus was with still with them.

That’s our Easter calling, sisters and brothers of the Risen Jesus, to go out and “open minds” to the truth of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Author of Life. Just over 15 years ago our ELCA in its churchwide assembly approved by an overwhelming margin a social statement entitled “Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice” — years before concern about global warming and climate change became the order of the day. It began with these strong words: “*Christian concern for the environment is shaped by the Word of God spoken in creation, the Love of God hanging on a cross, the Breath of God daily renewing the face of the earth.*”

It continued: “*We of the ELCA are deeply concerned about the environment, locally and globally, as members of this church and as members of society. Even as we join the political, economic, and scientific discussion, we know care for the earth to be a profoundly spiritual matter.*”

Next follows the confession: *“As Lutheran Christians, we confess that both our witness to God’s goodness in creation and our acceptance of caregiving responsibility have often been weak and uncertain....This statement summons us, in particular, to a faithful return to the biblical vision.”*

Then follow ten pages that detail the “The Church’s Vision of Creation,” “The Urgency” of our present situation, “The Hope” that is ours as Christians and “The Call to Justice” all of which issue in “Commitments of This Church” which seek to spell out what we can do as “individual Christians,” as “a worshiping and learning community,” as a “community of moral deliberation” and as an “advocate” within both the private and public sectors. *“This church,”* the statement affirms, *“will favor proposals and actions that address environmental issues in a manner consistent with the principles of participation, solidarity, sufficiency, and sustainability”* and further will use these principles to

*“advance international”* agreements, while encouraging *“the United Nations in its caregiving role.”* *“We will,”* we claim, *“collaborate with partners in the global church community, and learn from them in our commitment to care for God’s creation.”*

One of the books I brought back from the recent Lutheran World Federation meeting of theologians in Augsburg, in fact, is this little booklet published earlier this year in Geneva by the LWF entitled God, Creation and Climate Change: A Resource for Reflection and Discussion which is only preliminary to a book of more “in-depth biblical, theological and ethical” articles on the topic that will be published later this year by LWF. I’d like to use this resource for our Bible study time before worship that maybe we could take up this summer.

In our second reading from the first Letter of John we heard these compelling words: *“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are...beloved, we*

*are God's children now.*” **Now** is the time for us to “practice resurrection” in our relationship to our fellow-creation, for Jesus is the Author of life—all life!

The peace that passes understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.  
Amen.