

***The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost***  
*Exodus 16:2-15, Psalm 104:24-30, Romans 8:12-25, Matthew 6:26-33*

***September 7th, 2008***

***Episcopal Church of Our Saviour  
Mill Valley, California***

**A Play Date with Creation**

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This past weekend, Daniel had a scheduled play date with a friend over at Green Gulch, so he, Hiroko, and I drove over in the heat. We found ourselves standing in the silence of the fields and beds there – the clean but not-quite-straight rows of lettuce, the pumpkins beginning to get their color, the scented roses. And Hiroko and I noticed the silence of things growing. . . being, even. . . without the mechanical noises and machinery that so clutter up the air even in Mill Valley.

Daniel and I were fascinated by a stalk of grass as it inch-by-inch was pulled into the ground by a hungry gopher. And we watched the quail run about in the dusk while a cat stalked them. It struck me in light of today's readings that the natural world can come into some balance with people, as it seems to at Green Gulch. Or, to put it more accurately, people can come into balance with the natural world and learn from it.

There is a particular way the creatures and green things God has woven into the fabric of creation have something to say to us about trust, about simply being, of finding a life of balance with their fellow creatures without having to call government summits or form lobby groups. . .without suing big corporations or drilling or strip mining. . .without overfishing or clogging up the waterways with garbage.

With hurricanes bearing down on the Caribbean, Southeast, and Gulf Coasts, arctic ice melting more and more rapidly, and the grim prognosis of a human population approaching the tipping point of unsustainability. . . all the environmental news and fears hitting us in rapid succession, we hear again Paul as he writes to the church in Rome two thousand years ago that all of creation groans as it awaits the appearance of the "children of God.". What if, I wondered this weekend while standing in the silence of the cultivated rows and watching the quail dance. . .what if we are to be those children?

The call of the Kingdom that Jesus points to in today's Gospel, the in-breaking of God's reign, means to set aside our cravings and hoarding, our lack of trust in the wilderness, to stop clinging to our voracious, unfettered appetites for all that clutters our lives, maims the creatures of God, and poisons the earth. We are called to abandon the well-worn bitter roads of global exploitation and turn to the abundant trust that so many of our fellow creatures exhibit...to *be* more than to *do*...to seek God's gift of balance for all of Creation.

When was the last time you took time to pray for the earth, for the imperiled lilies of the field, for the threatened sparrows? Our prayers too often assume that we are all that matters in creation. The Good News is that God meets us more than halfway in our selfishness. We recall in Exodus today that the Israelites in the wilderness have their cravings satisfied, at least for a short time. Christ comes to us in human form and embraces the anthro-centrism of the human family even knowing that we, in our usual blindness, cannot move beyond taking advantage of our sisters and brothers, let alone our neighbors the trees, the earthworm, the butterfly. But we are loved anyway.

Today's Gospel is more radical and yet more comforting than we often dare imagine. Radical because Jesus points to the natural world as a source of wisdom, a reservoir of grace to amend our wayward paths. Comforting, because we are reminded that we are hemmed in by the Divine, of even more value perhaps than many sparrows, yet not even a one of them falls beyond the reach of God's love.

The Kingdom, whatever else we might imagine it to be, must include a healed Creation, where the great cycles of life are restored and enhanced by God's children. It is therefore a profoundly spiritual act to conserve energy, to seek ways to reduce our carbon footprint; to pair down our consumption and take responsibility over our insatiable desire for more; to avoid the chemicals and products that the land and seas cannot reclaim, and dispense with the disposable way of life; to support our brothers and sisters raising seasonal and organic produce; to recover the sense of oneness with the land that generations of our ancestors lived and breathed almost without thinking.

In doing so, just as by loving God and loving our human neighbors, we can participate in becoming the children of God for which creation so loudly groans.

As I finished this sermon last night, I thought I heard the soft footsteps of the deer in the grass when they come, as they do many nights this time of year, along Corte Madera Creek behind our apartment to forage. They move quietly through the midst of the artificial world we have built around them, annoying gardeners perhaps, but otherwise simply being the deer they were made to be. . .and waiting. . .waiting along with the rest of Creation.

Waiting perhaps for us to show up for a play date. To re-enter a deep relationship with the earth that sustains our physical needs and inspires our spirits. To engage in the dance of life again that God made, and perhaps re-open ourselves to the grace that is there. . .a grace that will heal us and that can, if only we would let it, restore the earth to wholeness.