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Born to Be Wild

Mark 1: 1-15

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One of the points I was trying to get across in the sermon last week was that the purpose we humans have in life is not to control everything but to become integral with the larger Earth community. To recognize that we are part of this seamless, singular, amazing universe and fruitful Earth, gifted by God in unique ways to fulfill our destinies, is to glorify God and radiate back to life its goodness and beauty. Clearly, this is a moment which calls for deep reflection on how we understand life to be – as a communion of subjects and not, as our industrial economy believes, a collection of objects – for our place and purposes are within the whole, because, like it or not, we have evolved to become caretakers, stewards of life.

Today, I want to take up this thought again from a bit of a different angle because I believe we are living in a moment in time that can only be characterized as a crisis. By crisis, I mean how one of the Chinese languages understands it; as a “dangerous opportunity.” We live in a dangerous time for a lot of reasons, the greatest of which is the devastation of the planet. We humans have so impacted Earth, especially in this age of industrialization, that the biological and geological systems that make up and support life are collapsing. We can bring about rapid extinctions – and we are doing so – but we can’t bring about life out of nothing – only God can. And yet, this is a moment of amazing opportunity for us to recover an intimacy with Earth, all her creatures and ourselves which, I believe will open our spiritual lives like only a deep conscious connection with the Creator of all, can.

I say this is an opportune moment because never before has western civilization been made so aware of not only the devastation we are heaping on our own home, but of the amazing powers of the universe. Never before have so many individuals and small grass roots organizations been involved in thousands of issues related to caring for Earth and social justice for the weakest and most vulnerable human beings. There are hundreds of thousands of extinctions happening every decade, and yet, there is an energy going on in human communities around the world that has unlimited potential to move creatively into the future.

This week, a book I ordered came in, written by Paul Hawken titled, “Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One

Saw it Coming. Hawken is an entrepreneur and an environmentalist, a deep thinker and excellent speaker. He has been advocating for environmental, social justice and peace issues for three decades, and this book comes out of ten years of his going around the country speaking to large groups of people about these issues and ways to address them. After every talk, he writes, dozens of people come to him telling him what they are doing in their local communities to address these things, small organizations and businesses, most are non-profit and volunteer run. After a few years of hearing these stories and collecting cards and brochures, Hawken began to compile a list, a data base adding up how many of these businesses and organizations there are all over the world. And to make a long story short, he and his associates have counted well over one million of these groups all over the world, working in one way or another for change, to make the human more integral to Earth and each other in the ways of justice and peace. "It is a movement," he writes, "with no defined leader, fiercely independent, crossing a swath of political loyalties, multi-cultural/racial/ethnic/religious. You can't nail this down. It has no manifesto or doctrine, no overriding authority. . . It is arising from the bottom up."

Today, there is most certainly an energy in people to live with each other and Earth as we've been created to be. But "this energy," writes Thomas Berry, "will be available only for a brief period. Such transformative moments arise in times of crisis that need resolution immediately. The time for action is passing. The time is limited. The Great Work remains to be done." We are at, I believe, what the Bible calls a kairos moment. The Greek of the New Testament has two words we translate time – chronos and kairos. Chronos is chronological time, time marching on. Kairos is "the right time," God's time. It's when things come together – perhaps after things fall apart – when you **know** it is the time. And it's a time that doesn't linger long because you can't conjure up or bottle the Powers of God for human creativity or action because it is part of the larger Mystery of life.

In the Gospel, we read that John the Baptist "appeared" in the wilderness, just at the right time, just as Jesus was moving towards his public and prophetic ministry. And then, of course, comes Jesus: "Now after John was arrested . . ." Jesus comes out of the wilderness and preaches, "The time is fulfilled. . ." The time was ripe. "But when the fullness of time had come," wrote Paul to the Galatian Christians, "God sent his Son . . ." (Galatians 4: 4).

I believe that this is the time for the Church, for followers of Jesus, to engage in deep reflection and determined action to become who we have always been and always will be: integral to Earth, children of God, called to preserve, conserve and defend life – human and other than human – for this is essential to the good news of God.

Today, I want to suggest two other things, in addition to what I was talking about last week, for us to prayerfully and thoughtfully consider in this kairos moment. It was to be three as it all fit together, but late Friday afternoon this sermon had gotten out of control so I'll save the third part for next week.

First, I believe we need to save wild places. I say this for a couple of reasons. One is that we have to protect as much of the non-paved, non-deforested, non-chemical laden areas of the planet as possible for habitat for species of all kinds. The future of

the biological systems of Earth depend on this because, as you know as well as I do, nothing can exist, let alone thrive as Earth intends, with a severely depleted planet. And that includes you and me. Everything life needs to flourish is here – no place else and it cannot be created by us. If we honestly believe we are not adversely effected when rivers and lakes are polluted, forests degraded, oceans strip-mined or the tops of mountains blasted off, even when they are thousands of miles away, then we don't understand the first thing about the interconnectedness of this life God created. Every part of this planet is a part of us, a seamless whole. What effects one part, effects the whole. Secondly, because by saving wild places, we are saving our own essential nature. The Universe is wild. Earth is wild. **We** are wild. Our industrial societies of at least the last 150 years, want to control, to make everything the same, or at least, control things for maximum efficiency – human designed efficiency, that is. But that's not the way life is. It's wild, beyond our control. If you don't think that is true, go out sometime in a forest where there are no roads – get away from things – and don't take a gun or a chain saw. And if you **really** want to experience this, go where there are bears or mountain lions, some creature that can eat you. Or take a small boat out on the ocean, far from land – perhaps so you can't see the land anymore - and just sit there, especially if a storm comes up. Or when the next thunderstorm really gets cranking, go outside, stand right in the middle of a field or your street.

I suggest these things not to scare you or make you feel tiny or insignificant but to remind us that we are part of this wild nature. Yes, it gets domesticated out of us over the years and the more pavement is poured and open space is lost and shopping malls that go up, the less we connect to our essential nature. But like the group Steppenwolf sang almost 40 years ago, we were “Born to be Wild.”

Actually, for many, this is frightening. One of the reasons, of course, is that if the nature of existence as God creates it is essentially wild, it means that finally you and I are not in, and cannot control, life. And we do want to be in control, don't we? Just try to take away the TV flipper from the person who usually holds onto it in your house and you'll find out very quickly about control. Whether that be in personal relations or our own emotions or with our children or spouse or friends, we are pulled towards control – at least of some sort. I suppose that's part of our cultural DNA. For us Americans, it started **at least** when the first Europeans came to this continent whose preachers claimed that our sacred destiny was to subdue the wild lands, forests, rivers, native peoples; to take control of it all. And that instinct was quite natural because Earth is not only benign and nourishing but she is violent and destructive, as well.

But the psalmist says something incredibly wise: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111: 10). To have a healthy “fear” of the natural powers of Earth is very wise. But perhaps, as you may know, that fear in biblical language, is also reverence, and it is a certain reverence before the wildness of life is what is needed today. Today, places on Earth once out of our control are vanishing at an astonishing rate, imperiling not only species other than human but humans as well – along with our souls. For the outer world activates the inner life of the spirit, and what will happen to our spiritual lives when the last wild places are domesticated and under our control? When the last forest is felled or field paved over? What will happen to our souls if the smog gets so thick or there are so many electric lights shining that we can no longer

see the Milky Way? Something in the wild depths of our souls finds its fulfillment in nature's wildness. Why do you think the prophets went into the wilderness or, like John the Baptist, "appeared" in the wilderness? Where else could they be tested, felt God's Presence and received their visions of this wild, uncontrollable life, this God whose presence shakes the mountains and makes the lava flow? Where else would the Desert Fathers and Mothers go to meet this Creator God of Mystery and Silence than where the wild power of life is so readily evident? Where else would Jesus have gone and returned to over and over again, to listen to the Voice of his God? He was tested there – physically, emotionally, spiritually – to struggle and suffer and then, to be re-created, made new. You see, wilderness is the well-spring of creativity – natures and ours – and it is the root of all spontaneity.

As one woman told a group assembled in Florida months after Hurricane Andrew, "she do not consider herself a victim but a participant in this wild event in all its creative as well as destructive aspects. The hurricane, she insisted, was telling us something. It was telling us how to build our homes if we wished to dwell in this region. It was telling us to consider well the winds and the sea, to mark well the fact that if we live here we must obey the deeper laws of the place, laws that cannot be overridden by any type of human zoning. We might live here if we wish, she concluded, but on terms dictated by powers other than human." (Quoted in The Great Work, Thomas Berry, 1999, page 51).

What we need to know – physically and spiritually – is how to participate creatively in this wildness of life. And when we discover, or should I say, when we reclaim the wisdom built into our DNA by God that we, like all life, are created wild, then we will begin, like John the Baptist, all the prophets, and yes, even Jesus, to have visions for what God intends for us.

Secondly, may we never forget that our Creator, this "God beyond all praising," as the hymn goes, is also wild. In my opinion, one of the worst things about much of Christianity today, and perhaps why we are in such a time of confusion about where the Church is headed, is that we make God so small, put God in a box and try to control and then domesticate the Creator of all existence. O, I know why we do it – I do it! It's because we humans simply cannot comprehend God who is Mystery, and we want to be able to comprehend. We cannot put into language the nature of the One whose Nature brings life into being every moment of every day, everywhere. And since we can't fully comprehend, we so often create the illusion of perfect knowledge, and then, we "think" have control. And so, we create doctrines and systematic theologies and the Four Spiritual Laws and fundamentalisms on the right and the left that shrink God down to our size so we can control God and claim THE truth. Whether that be Muslim extremists or Christian fundamentalists, **we** have the Truth and **we** are in control of that Truth, because we have the Book or the knowledge or the only interpretation that is truth. Well, that's not the God I know or read - in either book - scripture or nature. This God is wild, free, eternally creating, destroying, then creating something new.

“Behold,”

says God through Second Isaiah

“I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth:
can’t you see it?”
(Isaiah 43: 19)

Do you remember the One who answered Job out of the whirlwind?

“Who is this that darkens counsel by

words without knowledge?
Gird up your loins like a man,
I will question you!”
(Job 38: 2-3)

Or when Earth shook and rocks split in two when Jesus took his last breath? Or when the Holy Spirit fell upon those gathered in that room on Pentecost and the sound of a violent rush of wind and divided tongues of fire appeared there? This is a wild God, unpredictable, so much so that as soon as we think we’ve got this One figured out, God blows it all away.

Or the God who led the Israelites in the wilderness by way of a pillar of fire and cloud?
And so, the final question I have for us today is this: will we let go of our illusions of control – of attempts to dominate nature, our own lives, and our tiny little images of God – and be the wild, creative beings we are? Will we turn our backs on the illusion that we are somehow separate from Earth and so then dominate and denigrate her life processes and still be wild creative children of God?

We are born to be wild, friends. May we live in this wildness with the One who loves us with an everlasting love.

Amen.