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Everything is Holy Now

Exodus 3: 1-6

Genesis 15: 1-6

August 5, 2007

In the sermon last week, I mentioned that my plan had been to tackle three points but the more I worked on things, the longer the sermon became. So, to spare you a 40 minute sermon, I set aside one point and said I'd get to it next week. Today is next week and though I have a bit of a different take on things because I'm not the same person I was seven days ago and neither are we as a community nor is Earth as a living planet, here it is.

One of the realities of our modern human living is that we live deeply alienated from the Universe; or scale it down a bit, we live alienated from Earth, the phenomenal world. This is a rather odd statement and a rather odd reality because, really, the phenomenal world is that world in which we live, without which, we couldn't have come into being and couldn't exist. It's the world we touch and taste, smell, see and hear, the world we experience directly from the moment we take our first breath outside the world of our mothers womb in a different but same larger world. I just learned last week that the root of the word phenomenal means a "shining forth." (Don't you think it's incredible that we have created a singular word that captures a reality relating to events, people and other life forms, because we know that something oozes through them all? And in the context I'm thinking of, Earth is the world of the shining forth, what we experience without any mediation from books or experts or even the latest nature program on TV. Amazing.

And yet, for a variety of reasons, we modern people have chosen to create a singularly human world, where all values are human values, where the natural world is experienced as subservient to the human – if there really are two such separate worlds. Of course, I know that there are many of you that this doesn't apply individually, but as a culture, we view the world as a collection of objects to power the economy, things to use for about 10 minutes or a couple of years, then throw it in a toxic landfill. As a society, I don't think we can honestly say that we really appreciate the "shining forth," the dazzling wonder, let alone the sacred dimension that finds expression in all life. If we did, would there be the degrading of the planet that is happening? If we viewed Earth as having a

sacred dimension, would we continue to treat her as if she was a machine, to be used up anyway we saw fit?

This, then, is the point I'd like for us to consider and let it percolate in our minds and heart: that the primary revelation of the Divine, of God, comes through what we call nature. It is the wonder and majesty of the universe that evokes the deepest and first sense of both the Divine origin of life and the sacred character of life. For thousands of years, our ancestors contemplated Earth and her bounty and awesome power. They lived in an intimacy with nature that very few human do today and as they did, they experienced the beauty, as well as the challenges and harsh testing that life brought forth. And this is what has always inspired the poets and prophets, mystics and children and the rest of us who care to take the time to pause, pay attention and wonder.

Did you hear in the stories of Abram and Moses where they encountered God, where God reached out and stirred their souls and changed their lives? Abram had a vision and as it moved along, God took him outside his tent and told him to do what? . . . Look in a book? Check the current market trends? Do a Map Quest? No. "God," the story says, "brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven and count the stars. . . ' You know me by how I'm revealed in life – all of it – and you can trust me." Or think of Moses. He didn't have a book. Eventually he was responsible for those who came after him to write a book. But how and where did he first encounter God? In the Burning Bush. The primary revelation of God was and is, life – Earth, the Universe, living breathing people and other modes of living, breathing beings.

You know, you and I are doubly blessed because we do have a book, written on paper and ink, the Bible, as a means of Divine revelation. And for Christians in general and we Baptists in particular, so often we have understood the Bible as the only, or at least the primary way of knowing God and God's purposes. But when that becomes the case, don't we shut off the millions upon millions of other means through which God is yearning to be seen and known? Certainly, we are, as we like to say, a people of the book. And that's good. But if we stop there, we neglect the wisdom of so many of those Christians who came before us, summed up on the words of Saint Augustine: "Some people, in order to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead, God set before your eyes the things that he made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that?"

What louder voice did Abram need to see than the stars or Moses, the Burning Bush?

Scripture can never replace our need for a natural world through which we can experience God directly – through a person or small group of people, a sunset or a flowing river, the strength of a mountain or a spider web shimmering in the sunlight or a butterfly fluttering above a crowded city street. If Earth is only a stage for the great action of human salvation or a collection of economic resources to use up, then not only do we have it wrong biologically and geologically, not only will the destruction of Earth continue, but we've become blind and can't see anymore with eyes of faith. God is alive, right within the creatures of life, right within the air and waters and soils, right within you and me. But if we begin to see Earth as our home and God moving through

it all, then we can see and feel the “shining forth,” we can step into this time and begin to live in a way that is integral to Earth, because now – now! – every thing, every place, every creature, every person is a Burning Bush; everything is holy now.

I close by playing a song I just heard a couple of weeks ago by Peter Mayer who writes and sing in praise of the sacredness of life. He is a Roman Catholic who had a radical conversion experience over a period of time beginning when he read a speech given at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The speaker was talking about the devastation of Earth and he said that one of the major reasons for it is the theology and practice of Christianity in general and the Roman Catholic Church in particular. This critique struck Mayer deeply: his Church and the faith he loved somehow promoted a way of thinking, being and living that was destroying Earth. Whether this critique was true or not, it stunned Mayer into a period of prayer, reflection and song writing. The following is a song from his CD, The Great Story, and it's called, “Holy Now.”

[Below are the lyrics]

Holy Now

Peter Mayer

When I was a boy, each week
On Sunday we would go to church
And pay attention to the priest
As he would read the holy word
And consecrate the holy bread
And everyone would kneel and bow
Today the only difference is
Everything is holy now
Everything, everything
Everything is holy now

And when I was in Sunday school
We would learn about the time
Moses split the sea in two
Jesus made the water wine
And I remember feeling sad
That miracles don't happen still
But now I can't keep track
'Cause everything's a miracle

Everything, everything
Everything's a miracle

Wine from water is not so small
But an even better magic trick
Is that anything is here at all
So the challenging thing becomes
Not to look for miracles
But finding where there isn't one

When holy water was rare at best
It barely wet my fingertips
But now I have to hold my breath
Like I'm swimming in a sea of it
It used to be a world half there
Heaven's second rate hand-me-down
But I walk it with a reverent air
'Cause everything is holy now

Read a questioning child's face
And say it's not a testament
That'd be very hard to say
See another new morning come
And say it's not a sacrament
I tell you it can't be done

This morning, outside I stood
And saw a little red-winged bird
Shining like a burning bush
Singing like a scripture verse
It made me want to bow my head
I remember when church let out
How things have changed since then

Everything is holy now

It used to be a world half-there

Heaven's second rate hand-me-down

But I walk it with a reverent air

'Cause everything is holy now.