

Let us pray... Eternal God, gather your Spirit in this place, and open our hearts to love.... Guide our journey together, with you at the center. Amen.

The year I lived in Vancouver Washington as a pastoral intern was interesting to say the least.

Not only was it during the depths of covid, but I experienced a week of terrible air quality... The air was, in fact, some of the worst in the world.

Thick grey masses of smoke choked out the sky and the sun was nowhere to be seen... Ash rained down onto the grass looking like snow...

The reason? A strange weather front mixed with atmospheric pressure kept all of the smoke from surrounding forest fires trapped in our area...

Outside it looked like a scene straight out of Armageddon... And inside, it wasn't much better. Furnace filters struggled to work properly, because the air was just too thick...

And so, it was recommended to get an air purifier.

Well, those sold out right away... And so, my mentors were kind enough to drop off a box fan, a furnace filter, and a bungee cord... And when they were attached together, it created a decent make-shift air filter...

So decent in fact, that just after one day, a once white filter had turned black.

It seems so strange to have experienced this... Never before had I worried about the air I breathed.

And I quickly realized air was something I took for granted...

And this can be the case for so many things in our natural world... We enjoy beautiful sunny days, make our way through really cold days, endure rainy days, and we don't think too much about the destructive force of nature. Until something really bad happens... A forest fire, a tornado, an earthquake, or a really bad storm...

Because it is easy to take nature for granted, and to forget that we are dependent upon the planet, that our very existence is interdependent with all of creation.

Which is something the disciples can relate to. These men, as you may recall, were originally fishermen...

Their very livelihoods depended upon the sea... And yet, something so near and dear to them, something that they perhaps took for granted, became a source of fear, because of a storm.

And I get it. Natural disasters are alarming and scary... And yet, they are also a reminder of the delicate balance of creation, and how the world is interconnected in ways we can't even begin to untangle...

And since we are a part of the world, what we choose to do, or not do, also impacts the planet... For good or for bad...

And I know, this is not an easy message to hear... Partially because environmental opinions have become politicized... And because being environmentally friendly usually involves some sort of effort or sacrifice.

But the truth is... This beautiful and so very special planet, is our home... A home that God created... Not just for humanity, but for all of life... Life that God created to thrive... Through diversity, through relationship, and through community.

God created a place that was good... A place that God's very self, entered into through the body of Christ... Bringing the Kingdom of God to earth.

And I often talk about how we can continue to usher in the Kingdom of God through our thoughts, words, and deeds.

But we don't often talk about how we can see the Kingdom of God continuing to break in...

I see it breaking in through acts of kindness, grace, and love... And I also see it breaking in through a beautiful sunrise or sunset, in clean air, healthy forests, flowing water, plants, and animals... As all of these things are physical reminders of God's promise land...

A land flowing with milk and honey...

And a fascinating thing about honey... Is that the honeybees take pollen, something ever so fleeting, and turn it into honey, something that can last forever...

And I don't think this is a coincidence, that our Old Testament writers chose honey of all things to symbolize God's promise land...

As God's promise land is a place that does last forever...

And I also don't think it is a coincidence that honey bees, who are so tiny and live such short lives are vital to crop survival...

Because the interconnections of this world are beyond fascinating. They are physical reminders that God's promises are real, as they remind us of God...

Take if you will a tree. It dies and falls to the ground... And in its death and decay, it becomes a nurse log for new life to sprout up and grow.

A dead tree is a physical embodiment of how life can and does spring forth from death...

Coincidence then, that Christ died on a cross that was carved from a tree? I don't think so...

And not only this, but the day Christ died, that day turned dark, from noon to three... Signifying something alarming, the death of God.

For three hours it was dark... Three hours, to represent the three days that Christ would not be with us... Until dawn broke into our world on that glorious morning of Christ's resurrection, ushering in a new creation.

And every day since, holds this sacred rhythm... And even though it's always darkest before the dawn, we know that morning will come.

Allowing us to embrace the night, placing our hope in the dawn of tomorrow, when Christ's light will dance across the sky. Each day we rise to a physical reminder, that there really is hope in what is yet to come.

And in a world where Jesus does not physically walk with us, where God's voice does not descend from the heavens, we need all of the reminders we can get. Especially those that we can see, touch, and experience...

And I think God knows this... Which is why God calls us to be good stewards of creation, so that we can discover and experience these fascinating and glorious truths here and now, by tending to the many interconnections with love.

As God's faithfulness and love is woven into creation itself. We only need to open the eyes of our hearts to see it.

This Lent, may you find ways to love the world that God so loves... So that all life may thrive... So that the kingdom of God continues to come near, dawning with the bright hope of tomorrow... Amen.