

John 14:15-21 & Acts 17:22-31
 6 Easter & Stewardship of Creation Sunday
 St. John's Ellicott City – 7:45, 9, 11:15
 The Rev. Rosemary Beales

The world is charged with the grandeur of God!
 The world is charged with the grandeur of God!¹
 The presence of God is all around us – can you tell on this glorious morning
 when God waters the earth and baptizes us anew?
 The presence of God is all around us.

Jesus did not leave us orphaned. That's the promise he makes to his disciples in today's gospel,
 and we have a lot of evidence of its truth,
 many ways to recognize God's continuing presence.

But today we celebrate the evidence that surrounds us
 with every step we take on this sturdy earth,
 with every breath that fills our lungs,
 every morsel of food that sustains our bodies,
 every note of birdsong that lifts our hearts.
 As we commemorate Earth Day and our
 Stewardship of Creation Sunday,
 Today we celebrate the presence of God in creation.

The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins writes,
“The world is charged with the grandeur of God!” –
 electric with glory.
 Imagine the grandeur that is “out there” suddenly stepping “in here.”
 Of course, **everything** you see in here — wood and stone; water and flame; flesh and bone—
 comes out of God's creation.
 But what if one day **everything** in creation were to come in here —
 walking or flying or growing or flowing –
 in one powerful procession?

That is kind of the scene that happens once a year
 at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City.
 In a film I saw recently called “Keeping the Earth,”²
 this scene materialized – at least the animal-kingdom portion of it—
 as the cathedral celebrated the feast of St. Francis of Assisi
 with the Blessing of the Animals.

Now I love the way we bless animals at OUR St. John's —
 when you bring your beloved dogs and cats and ferrets and frogs to our green hillside.
 But at St. John the Divine, I watched the procession bring all those sacred species –
 and a lot more -- inside the sacred space.

¹ Hopkins, Gerard Manley. “God's Grandeur.” *Poems*. London: Humphrey Milford, 1918; Bartleby.com, 1999.
www.bartleby.com/122/.

² Union of Concerned Scientists and Sierra Club, www.ucsusa.org, 1996.

Four thousand people stood in silence as the crucifer entered,
 and immediately behind her, in gentle humility, walked . . . an elephant,
 draped in garlands of flowers.
 On the shoulders of an acolyte rode a joyful chimpanzee.
 And toward the end of the procession,
 borne aloft the way you sometimes see a sacred object, like the gospel book,
 was a glass box.
 I clearly remember the expression on one worshipper's face at the sight of this TARANTULA –
 he clasped his hand to his heart, not in horror,
 but in something that looked like reverence
 as if he had suddenly realized that
“the world is charged with the grandeur of God.”
 In the face of such grandeur, reverence IS the right response.

For in each of the animals in that great procession,
 And in animal life too tiny to see, too huge to be contained even in a cathedral;
 in the million manifestations of plant life;
 in majestic mountain peaks and fragrant coastlines,
 in ice caps and in desert — the presence of God is with us.

“I will not leave you orphaned,” Jesus says today.
 “I will send you another Advocate, the Spirit.”
 It's that Spirit — the same Spirit, *ruach*, breath of God,
 that hovered over creation at the very beginning.
 It's that Spirit who inspires us to see in creation
 the presence of the One who is our eternal parent,
 who gave us “this fragile earth, our island home.”³
 And what can we know of the Giver by the gifts?
 In each of the gifts of creation, God shows us something of God's own self.

We do not have an unknown God,
 like the pagans Paul encounters in today's lesson from Acts,
 those Athenians who try to cover their bases by building one more temple.
 lest they offend some unnamed deity.
 But, Paul tells them, “the God who made the world, and everything in it,
 He who is the Lord of heaven and earth,
 Does not live in shrines made by human hands.”

We worship a God we can know as surely through creation as through scripture.
 Sometimes, I think, a drop of rain is as good as a word;
 a rush of wind a paragraph;
 a flight of geese a whole page
 of what God feels and sounds and looks like.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God!

³ Eucharistic Prayer C, Book of Common Prayer 1979, page 370.

“We conduct a continuing conversation with God as we move through God’s creation,”
says Rabbi Ismar Schorsch.⁴

“Any act which destroys circumscribes limits the conversation.
Losing a species is like tearing a page out of Scripture.”

Tearing out a page is a horrifying thought to most of us,
who revere the revelation of God in the Bible.

And yet every day, it seems, we hear news of some further tearing-away in nature:
News as loud as the machinery that shears off mountaintops for their coal;
and as silent as the mysterious disappearance of honey bees.

What, then, are we to do?

There is no shortage of ideas about how to protect the gifts of creation.
Newspapers last Sunday, in advance of Earth Day, were chock full of suggestions
for energy-efficient light bulbs; improved recycling; fuel-friendly cars.
These are all important and I commend them to you.

But “we cannot be saved by science or technology.” Those words come from a scientist,
Nobel Laureate Henry Kendall.⁵

Science is, of course, part of creation, too, and we are blessed by it
But “we cannot be saved by science or technology.”

Rather, I think, we can only be saved by a return to reverence—a reverence you’ll find
reading Verity Weston-Truby’s description of a daffodil in this month’s *Godsibb*.⁶

We can only be saved by a conversion of the heart –
a conversion you might experience

as you walk the creation trail on this campus
or visiting the children’s alphabet garden.

We can only be saved by a recognition,
through the Holy Spirit, that all of creation
reveals the Creator.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

And if we who dwell in this God-charged world cannot be saved by science,
might we be saved by . . . a story?

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⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Godsibb, meaning “God’s news” in old English, is the parish newsletter.

Long ago, when the world was brand new,
 When all the creatures – animals, wind, water, trees, rocks –
 Could speak one another's languages,
 There began . . . an ARGUMENT.
 Because one of the first thing the creatures wanted to talk about
 Was where they had come from, and who had put them here,
 They began to argue . . . about GOD.

The breeze began it: "God is a wind who is never still."
 No, said the stone, "God is a rock that never moves."

The mountain said, "God is a snowy peak, high above the clouds.
 The ocean said, "God is as deep as the big blue sea."

The star said, "God is a twinkling and a shining, far away."
 The ant said, "God is as close as the earth under your feet."

The willow said, "God is a great tree, a part of the world,
 always growing and giving."
 The island said, "God is separate and apart."

Then the last creature to speak spoke up.
 This creature was the last to learn to use its voice
 Because it is the slowest creature of all.
 But finally, Old Turtle spoke up and said,
 "STOP!
 All of you are wrong . . . and all of you are right.
 God is not any one of those things. God is ALL those things, and more.
 "God is as deep as the sea AND as high as the mountain.
 God is as free as the wind, AND as solid as a rock.
 God is as close as a blade of grass, AND beyond the farthest light.
 God is gentle AND powerful –
 Above all things and within all things.

The other creatures were so surprised they became speechless!
 But Old Turtle had one more thing to say. She said:

“Soon there will be a new family of creatures in the world,
 strange and wonderful . . .
 They will be reminders of all that God is . . .
 Their thoughts will soar to the stars,
 But their feet will walk the earth.
 They will be strong, yet tender
 A message of love from God to the earth,
 And a prayer from the earth back to God.”⁷
 * * *

God has given the human family
 We strange and wonderful creatures who are a message of love...and a prayer...
 our own place in that great procession of life,
 God has called us to enter a cathedral not made by human hands,
 a cathedral of earth and air and sky and sea,
 in the company of our fellow creatures.
 God calls us now to **save** this creation,
 But also **to be saved by it** –
 Learning to recognize God in the world around us,
 And to respond with reverence.

For God has not left us orphaned, but surrounds us on every side,
 “The world is charged with the grandeur of God.”

Amen.

⁷ Adapted from Wood, Douglas. *Old Turtle*. Illustrated by Cheng-Khee Chee (Duluth, Minn.: Pfeifer-Hamilton Publishers, 1992). “A portion of the Proceeds from *Old Turtle* is donated to projects that promote environmental healing and international understanding.”