

Sermon for April 23, 2017
Earth Day
“Reconciling with Creation”

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

“In Christ, God was reconciling the world to God’s self.” Have you ever experienced reconciliation? To know reconciliation you first have to have been alienated. Perhaps it was a friend or a family member. The closer the person was to you, the greater the alienation you experienced. It is like a wall or chasm that is uncrossable, has been placed between you and that person. And someone has to reach across that divide and reach out to the other to be reconciled.

I remember being alienated from one of my best friends. It was my fault. I had been careless and unthinking. He had even warned me, but I betrayed his trust anyway. I had done it without thinking, but after the fact I realized how greatly I had hurt him. So I reached out; I apologized for my thoughtless actions. And we were reconciled.

You all know what that is like. Not just in our social connection but in our connection to God. We have all felt alienated from God. We have all felt alone and separated from the origin and the foundation of our existence. We have all acted thoughtlessly and ignored God’s warnings and violated God’s trust in us. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory God planned for us. And we have felt separated by a chasm of our own sin.

Despite this alienation God has reached out to us in Jesus. In Christ God was reconciling us through his sacrifice and love. God cast our sin on him, the one who was truly sinless, so that we could reach up to God who was reaching down to us. And we were made new creatures. We were no longer separated from God, but were one with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

That is what Paul is talking about in this passage from 2 Corinthians that we read. We have been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. And we have been given this ministry of reconciliation. We are called to participate in reconciling others to God. In fact Paul calls us ambassadors of Christ. We represent God to those who are alienated from God.

That is a huge responsibility. We, you and I, are God’s mouthpiece. It is our job to speak God’s word of reconciliation and to reach out to others in the love of God. The goal of that reaching out is so that they could be reconciled to God.

We know how important that is. We sing of “what a friend” we have in Jesus. We talk of the “amazing grace that saved a wretch like me.” We are called by God to share that message of reconciliation to God with everyone.

So what does all this have to do with Earth Day? Good question? It is interesting that in this passage where it says that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,” the Greek word for “world” is “cosmos.” So, in Christ, God was not only reconciling with people, but with all creation. To understand the significance of this you have to look at the Bible: well, we will just look at Genesis and Revelation.

In Genesis God took the dust of the earth to form the first human and then breathed the breath or spirit into it. So we as humans are basically earth and the Spirit of God brought together. But those first human sinned. They had lived in a garden provided by God, where all was provided for them. And all they had to do was work in the garden and lovingly care for it as a gift from God. But they sinned and were cast out of the Garden. They were separated from that paradise where they had walked and talked with God. And one of the curses on them is that they would toil to work the ground to earn their bread.

That is the alienation from creation. In the Book of Revelation we have an image of the reconciliation. At the end of the book it tells us that in the end there will be a new Heaven and new Earth and there will be no more sea. All creation will be made new. The “sea” in the Hebrew mind was a symbol of chaos, especially the spiritual chaos of a life divorced from God. In this new creation at the end of time, there will be no more separation from God. We would walk in talk with God and bask in God’s glory in a garden of a city: the New Jerusalem.

We have been separated from God through our sin. And a part of that separation and alienation from God is an alienation from creation. We were created from the earth to live in harmony with it. Yet people often think of themselves as being at odds with creation. We speak of conquering the elements. We act in an adversarial way as if the environment was the enemy.

On a daily level we are often separated from the world around us. We live our lives isolated from creation in our environmentally controlled cocoons. We are disconnected from the world around us. We are alienated from the cosmos.

We are separated spiritual from God and God’s creation. And through Christ God is reconciling us. We have sinned against God’s creation through our careless and unthinking action. And in Christ God is calling us to be reconciled. God is calling us to seek to understand and live in harmony with creation.

That reconciliation can happen on many different levels. On a spiritual level we can acknowledge that we are part of God’ creation. We can embrace the spiritual truth that we are the dust of the earth made alive by the breath of God. We can view the world around us as a sacred gift given to us by God.

Then on another level we can seek to live our lives in harmony with that creation. We can recycle and try to lessen the amount of garbage we create. We can be aware of practices that lessen our negative impact on the environment. We can drive slower or choose habits that lessen our consumption of energy. We can lower our carbon footprint.

And on another level we can become ambassadors of this reconciliation with the cosmos. We can share this good news of reconciliation with God and God’s creation. We can preach and witness to actions and ways of life that care for creation instead of opposing it. We can acknowledge the problems of pollution, extinction, wilderness destruction, and climate change and seek to combat those sins even when our political leaders seek to expand them.

In Christ God has reached out to us so that we can be reconciled with the Creator. And we have been given the ministry of being a part of this reconciliation in the world. First of all that means that we are called to proclaim God’s reconciling love through acts of mercy and justice, through deeds of kindness. We are to testify to God’s reconciling love in Christ so that others can be reconciled and no longer feel alienated from God. We are ambassadors of God taking God’s proclamation of peace to all.

But as part of this we are a part of God’s reconciling action toward all creation. We as Christians are called to be reconciled with creation. We are called to care for it not just use the world and its resources in an uncaring or unthinking manner. We are called to proclaim the good news of being reconciled to God and God’s creation.

Be ambassadors of God’s kingdom in your attitudes and actions concerning the environment.