

Rogation Sunday  
Leviticus 26:1-13  
Canticle 12  
1 Timothy 6:7-10, 17-19  
Luke 12:13-21

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I speak to you in the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. *Amen.*

On this sixth Sunday of Easter, we're taking a break from the Easter lessons presented us from the Acts of the Apostles, the Revelation to John, and the Gospel of John to celebrate God's creation. In this month's Lych Gate you read a brief summary of the history of Rogation Sunday. Rogation Days are traditionally the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday prior to Ascension Day, sometimes called Holy Thursday, which falls forty days after Easter, this year on May 5. Before our world became industrialized and automated, these Rogation Days were an important religious observance, which included solemn prayers and fasting.

Rogation may be a new term for some of you; it literally means "asking," and that's what we're doing today, just as the ancients did: asking God to bless the earth and make it fruitful so there will be enough food for all of us. In those days when everyone lived from the land, using their own hands to produce what they needed, the people of the parish would gather together on Rogation Days, as the priest "beat the bounds" of the parish in an outdoor procession around its borders. Remember that parishes then were not only churches, they were geographical boundaries. We will not be processing around Rutherford County on foot or otherwise, but we can be mindful that our prayers today are for the whole earth and all that is in it, including all of Rutherford County.

Thirty-something years ago I enrolled in my first comprehensive Bible study. "The Bethel Series," is a two-year course that relies on phrases and images and lots of memorization to help its students understand the Bible and remember what it says. The images are pictures, some of them odd and bizarre, that bring home the point being made through scripture. In the first one, the earth is held by two giant hands lifting it out of the hazy mist of chaos. God's fingers on one hand are opened to show that God relinquished the earth to humankind as a gift. On top of the earth is a human figure holding a crown with four jewels. The jewels are there to remind us that God gave humankind four responsibilities toward the earth on which we dwell: to replenish the earth, to subdue the earth, to dress, till and keep the earth, and to have dominion over it.

At first glance the picture reminds me of that song "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands," As small children, we're taught that God created the earth, in a wondrous and generous act. Genesis gives us two versions of the creation story, both of which clearly portray God as Creator. Today is not a day to debate whether those stories are fact or truth; we who believe in God also believe that God created the earth—regardless of what we believe about *how* God created the earth. We can agree about that; but I'm not sure we can agree about how we are to take care of it. This isn't a modern dilemma. In our lesson from the Book of Leviticus, we hear God say "you shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary." This passage comes *after* the story about Adam and Eve getting kicked out of Eden, *after* they and their children learned how to survive using the earth's resources, *after* the great flood. If you do what I ask, God says, if you keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary—the earth—I'll make the land fruitful and I'll make you fruitful, too. It seems God has done better in keeping that deal than we have.

The parable told by Jesus in Luke's Gospel brings that home if we pay attention to it. It's often called the Parable of the Rich Fool, Jesus' response to the question "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." In those days, as we know, the eldest son inherited everything; his brothers often had to make their own way with the leftovers if there were any or by struggling to make a living in whatever way they could manage. First, Jesus tells his listeners not to be greedy, then relates the story of this farmer who had so much stuff all he could think about was how to keep it for himself. The farmer has no concern for anyone else and therefore no concern for God. "So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

The other day I rode to Lake Lure with some friends for a late lunch. All of us are transplants, coming from places that are geographically very different from Western North Carolina. We talked for a moment about how strikingly beautiful these hills and mountains are and wondered if folks who have lived their entire lives here take them for granted. As the conversation moved along, we agreed that the locations we've come from are beautiful, too, in their own ways. It's just when you see something every day for a lifetime it can become commonplace so that you no longer see it at all. Is that what has happened to us as stewards of God's creation? Have we stopped being awed by the miracle of it and complacent about what it provides for us, about how God provides for us through it? Do we ever stop to make the connection between God and earth, between us and God and earth and say a simple thank you?

Our understanding of who God *is* plays a big part in how we view creation. Most of us, when we think of God, naturally have some image of God in our minds. Our faith in Jesus Christ as the incarnate God enables us to consider God in bodily form and function, perhaps in human form. Sally McFague says that "If God is always incarnate [that is, if God is embodied], then Christians should attend to the model of the world as God's body.<sup>1</sup> McFague names three implications of this model in our understanding of how God and the world are related and who cares for the world. The first is that "we must know our world and how we fit into it; second, that that we must acknowledge God as the only source of all life, love, truth, and goodness; and third, that we realize that while God is in charge of the world, so are we."<sup>2</sup>

McFague quotes Annie Dillard, who writes in her book *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, 'Seem like we're just set down here,' a woman said to me recently, 'and don't nobody know why.'" Dillard continues, "Some unwanted, taught pride diverts us from our original intent, which is to explore the neighborhood, view the landscape, to discover *where* it is that we have been so startlingly set down, even if we can't learn why."

Considering the world as God's body may be just what we need to understand not only why, but what we are to do about it. It might just give us a reason to stop some of the things we do—without even thinking—things that not only harm the earth for our use, but for the use of our children and grandchildren and their children and grandchildren. As McFague says, "We need to learn 'home economics,' the basic rules of how our garden home can prosper—and what will destroy it. Most simply", she says, "these house rules are: take only your share, clean up after yourself, and keep the house in good repair for others."<sup>3</sup> Golden rules for the earth, and they shouldn't be too hard for us to keep.

Let us pray.

God, we join with the sun and moon, the waters and mountains and all the animals that you created in praising you. Help us to do what you created us to do, to love and care for each other and for all the creatures of the earth so that our lives will glorify you. In Jesus' name we pray.  
*Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> McFague, Sallie, in *Essentials of Christian Theology*, William C. Placher, Ed. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2003. p 110.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 111.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 112.