

“How Will We Impact Earth’s Web of Life?”

Friends, longtime and new, each of us sourced by the fathomless Love that is God, please pray with me.

Incarnate God of resurrection, Creative Spark in all life, as we seek to follow Jesus along the path of interdependent Love, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

Do you find it fairly commonplace to hear articulations or echoes of the concept that we are all connected – that all parts of the natural world interact in some way? From year to year, I often encounter this concept illustrated as a web of life around the time of Earth Day. At first glance, a spider’s web might appear fairly lifeless. There it is, stretched across the corner of my living room ceiling, unmoving, unchanging. Ah! But that is a false impression I form about the web by keeping myself at arm’s length and apart from it.

During my seminary studies, I acquired language to undergird a theology of interdependence. This concept has augmented my understanding and sensibilities around how we are interconnected in the web of life.

Interdependence is about agency and mutuality. Each being’s movement can impact the wellbeing of another. Each of our movements has effects that either support the wellbeing of another or harm the other through neglect or aggression.

Acceptance of the reality of our interdependence – of our agency and mutuality, of our power to affect one another – requires faith. Jesus said to Thomas, to those within earshot on that day inside the locked room, and to us today, *“You’ve become a believer because you saw me.”*

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” We will not always bear direct witness with one of our five senses to the effects we have on the wellbeing of another (for good or for ill). Yet we will be blessed (that is, devoted to the work of divine, life-affirming Love) if we live in ways that aim to appreciate, honor and uphold life, imagining the potential effects of our actions as we trust divine, life-affirming Love to work through us. *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

Friends, how will we believe, imagine and trust even when we find ourselves seeing more death than life? We are distraught over the evil genocide occurring moment by moment in Ukraine. We are more and more painfully aware of the magnitude of violence our ancestors have perpetrated and we continue to perpetrate against persons with black and brown bodies by way of racist ideas and policies in this land. We sense the deep chill of hopelessness as the number of deaths by suicide continues to mount during this isolating time of pandemic, due to many factors including lack of access to mental health care and ongoing stigmatization of mental illness. The arc of the moral universe is bending way too slowly toward justice.

We feel sadness and rage; we feel powerless; we are overwhelmed. We long for God’s voice to cut through our feelings of sadness, rage and powerlessness so that we can discern how we will each respond to Love’s call to co-create of justice-based peace.

When I feel overwhelmed, I often return to words from American author, historian and Unitarian minister Edward Everett Hale, who lived from 1822 until 1909. He once wrote this about the courage and resolve it takes to put faith into action:

"I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do. What I can do, I should do. And what I should do, by the grace of God, I will do." Those are words from Edward Everett Hale.

What can I do? What can you do? This question's power lies in its simple capacity to elicit truth.

What could the apostles do? First, they could leave the locked room – not because they would be safe but because the Love of God in Jesus was calling them to work that was more compelling than their assured safety.

Moments ago, we heard Carol read these words: *"Through the hands of the apostles, many signs and wonders occurred among the people..."* What could the apostles do? They could live out loud their daily experience of rebirth into the salvific, healing Love of God. They could bear witness to the possibility of resurrection, boldly ministering in the public sphere, teaching and healing in the name of Jesus.

Apparently, they could also be bravely prophetic. Powerful religious leaders (whom the oppressive, murdering, occupying Roman government counted on to help repress rebellion) summoned the apostles to appear before them, hoping to silence their teachings and dampen the enthusiasm surrounding them. We heard this vignette in the scripture reading: *"The apostles were taken before the Sanhedrin, and the high priest began to interrogate them: 'We gave you strict orders not to teach about that name, yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching—and you're determined to make us responsible for this Jesus' blood.' To this, Peter and the apostles replied, "Better for us to obey God than people! The God of our ancestors has raised Jesus, whom you put to death by hanging him on a tree..."*

Peter challenged his religious leaders to see their own responsibility clearly and to claim them. The leaders wished to shift the blame for their own actions and inactions. We are all personally well acquainted with that temptation. We have all attempted blame shifting when feeling defensive about our own guilt.

Defensive blame-shifting is rooted in fear. While we sometimes think of hate as the opposite of love, scriptures remind us that the opposite of love is actually fear. But truth, courage and love are all stronger than blame shifting and fear.

In the epistle of First John, a faith leader wrote to the early Christians:

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.”

In the face of all the current pain and suffering in Earth’s web of life, we often feel fear. If you turn your face toward the light of love, what can and so should do. In other words, what is the Love of God uniquely calling you to do? And so, ‘by the grace of God,’ what will you do?

In preparing for this service, I wished to draw on words from a contemporary poet prophet. When I reached out to the Berry Center for permission, I was met with unsurprising generosity. Essentially, the representative told me that our intended use of Wendell Berry’s poem in a service of worship sounded like fair use that Berry would likely approve, but that if I wanted to, I could reach out to Wendell Berry and ask him for permission.

I invite you to close your eyes now if you are comfortable doing so. Hear again a few words from the prophetic poet farmer’s “I Walk Among Trees,” spoken directly to you on this Integrity of Creation Sunday:

“Then what I am afraid of comes.

I live for a while in its sight.

What I fear in it leaves it,

and the fear of it leaves me.

It sings, and I hear its song.”

Friends in Christ – may we hear, appreciate, and honor the song of every being;
fully recognizing how we impact one another. Love is counting on us. Amen!

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April 24, 2022 (Integrity of Creation Sunday, 2nd Sunday of Easter)
John 20:19-29, Acts 5: 12-16, 27-32