

SERMON

May 13, 2007

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“Rogation Day”

The poet Dylan Thomas wrote a poem, *Fern Hill*,
about the happy days of his childhood on the family farm,
in which he says, “I was famous among the barns.”

When I was a kid, I was “famous among the back yards.”
I knew every inch of my neighborhood in the suburbs of Wichita.
I knew every bush and whether I could jump over it,
and every tree and whether I could climb it.

I knew every fence and where all the dogs lived.
I roamed across every back yard, and through all the streets.
It was my world.

The Prayer Book contains an almost-forgotten celebration called Rogation days.
These are the three days before Ascension Day,
which would be Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of this week.

In earlier days in England,
rural churches would have a procession
around the borders of the parish on Rogation Day.
It’s called, “beating the bounds.”

As they went they would bless the crops in the farmers’.
It’s a lovely tradition,
and it might be a good model for us today.

What they were doing in those Rogation processions
was staying in touch with the natural rhythms of their surroundings.
They were immersing themselves in God's Creation.

In an agricultural time, this was a normal and natural thing to do,
but we've lost our connection to the Creation.

In her new book *Vegetable, Animal and Miracle*,
Barbara Kingsolver writes about her families' decision
to move from Tucson to their family farm in Kentucky
and live off the land for a year.

She says that for a whole year they ate only food they grew
and animals they raised,
or else food that was grown in the local area.

As they did they gained a new appreciation for the basic things of life.
They didn't eat strawberries imported from Brazil,
or beef raised in Argentina,
or tasteless tomatoes grown in a hothouse in Mexico.
They knew where all their food came from.

Kingsolver says that we've gotten a collective "eating disorder"
in our country because we no longer know where our food comes from.
We think of food as a product
that appears on the shelves of the supermarket.

We've allowed multinational corporations to commoditize our food
and turn it into a product.

Nowadays, it takes more fossil fuels to transport the food
we eat than it does to grow it and harvest it.

Developing countries don't have cheap food
because they're exporting it for cash while receiving very low wages.

The need to keep food fresh means more additives and genetic engineering.

The recent news about melamine in pet food
makes us realize we don't have much control
over where our food comes from.

We're not in touch with the Creation any more.

We click a few buttons on a computer screen
and wait for the UPS truck to pull up outside our door.

But everything we have comes from somewhere.

When I think of the pioneers who came across the prairies in the covered wagons,

I think about what a paradise it must have seemed here in Oregon –
beautiful lush grass and tall timber, rich soil and abundant rainfall.

It was a paradise.

And now, 150 years later, we look around

and we see threats to our resources everywhere.

How can we protect this beautiful place we live in?

The Psalm for this morning is a Psalm of blessing.

“The earth has brought forth her increase;
may God, our own God, give us his blessing.
May God give us his blessing.”

In the Old Testament, the abundance of the earth
was seen as God's blessing on the people.

If you lived in accordance with God's commandments,
then God would bless the land with abundant harvests.

We live in such a beautiful place.

We are blessed over and again with the blessing of this place.
Our whole country is blessed with amazing resources.

We live on a planet that is a beautiful blue ball
spinning through space,
a complex web of life
wrapped up in swirls of clouds and water.

God has blessed us.

But the blessing comes with some responsibilities.
We can't just treat the Creation like a big WalMart,
but we have to care for the environment.

Churches are beginning to realize that care of the environment
is a religious issue.

We human beings are stewards of the earth,
and if we don't take care of the earth,
we will lose the blessing.

God has placed us on this planet
and given the earth into our care.

Global warming is a looming issue
that threatens to change everything about our life.

For nearly a century, we've been pumping carbon dioxide
into the atmosphere,
and it's beginning to affect the climate of the planet.

Scientists say that we have about ten years
to make drastic changes in our carbon emissions.

We have to learn how to live with a smaller carbon footprint.

That's going to mean changing our lifestyles,
 using less, recycling more, living more simply,
 and living closer to the source of what we consume.

We can't just treat the planet like a throw-away bottle.

We're going to have to be more connected to our environment.

We're going to have to learn where our food comes from.
 We're going to have to find new sources of non-polluting energy.
 We're going to have to work with other people to keep the planet healthy.

I think the idea of Rogation Day processions is a good one.

You've heard the saying, "Think globally, act locally?"
 Well, what that means is that the only way to take care of the planet
 is to take care of your back yard.
 A Rogation Day procession is taking care of your back yard.

So we're going to have
 a simple Rogation Day procession here Tuesday morning.
 We'll "beat the bounds" of the parish –
 at least, we'll march around the borders of our lot,
 and we'll bless the Garden.

We'll bless some water, too,
 so that anyone who wants to can take the water home
 and bless their own garden.

I hope that this Rogation Day might be the first of many Rogation Days,
 and I hope we can find other ways to connect ourselves to our environment,
 and remember that we are stewards of the planet,
 and caretakers of God's Creation.