

Proper 11A, St John's Olney, 23 July 2017

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Genesis 28:10-19a; Ps 139: 1-11, 22-23; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

S.D.G.

There is a group within the Episcopal Church that is promoting Holy Hikes. You could consider this to be Eucharist on the go, not on the go as in a drive-by-Eucharist, but on the go in that it progresses along a hiking trail. The hike begins with an opening prayer, a collect. Then there is a reading, and typically the hike begins, with people and dogs, in silence or quiet conversation as that reading is digested. After a distance the group stops and there is a psalm or other reading. It follows the basic outline of a Sunday Eucharist, though with hiking boots and hats, and between each reading or reflection there is quiet walking along a hiking trail.

Ultimately the group comes to an area, the more dramatic the landscape the better, where the Eucharistic prayers are said, the elements are consecrated, and shared. Then after a closing prayer everyone returns to their cars and goes about their day.

I like this idea of celebrating Eucharist in and around nature; but I have to ask why is it necessary? Why do we need to be so intentional about connecting the Eucharist and our worship to nature? When did we abandon our relationship with creation? And certainly I am speaking in broad terms, there are many in the church, and in this parish, who have a deep connection to creation; there are also many who no longer see the forest or the trees.

This Holy Hike group's website suggests that our relationship with creation is broken, and I don't disagree. Their aim is to "reestablish our communion with all of life." And they ultimately have a bigger goal; they know that we all protect the things we love, and they want all of us to love creation so we will protect creation. Their goal is laudable, and I personally support organizations that have a focus on protecting creation, many of my own photos are about seeing God in creation. But I still have to wonder why is it needed? How is it that we, and I am speaking generally, no longer see creation as the house of God?

Jacob was blind to God's presence in the world. While traveling he stopped to rest. It was in this resting place that he had a dream of angels ascending and descending to and from heaven, and God spoke to him. Jacob realized that the place where he rested was blessed, so he anointed the rock upon which he laid his head and called the place Bethel, the house of God.

Jacob rested in the place where Abraham had previously made a sacrifice to God, but he could have rested any place and had the same dream. It is wonderful that he sanctified that place as holy, but he could have also thrown a dart at a map and the resulting location would be holy as well. We are in the midst of God's creation, God looked at creation and said it is good, it is very good.

So when did we decide that there was a disconnect between God, creation, and humankind? There is likely no easy answer to that question, and likely no single event or point in time that can mark the beginning of the fall away from our loving relationship with creation. Nor is it likely to be marked as a linear decline. Certain contemporary events, such as the industrial revolution, will perhaps mark larger changes in attitude and practice towards a negative relationship with creation.

Throughout Scripture there is love and respect for creation. The psalmist today is clear that God knows our doings, our comings and goings, and God is with us always and everywhere. The answer to the psalmist's plea of "where can I go from your Spirit? where can I flee from your presence?" is that there is nowhere to escape from God. God is around us in all of creation, and God is within us through the Spirit. "God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good." (Gen 1:31a)

In Paul's letter there is a uniting of creation with humankind; both await, with labor pains, redemption and adoption by Abba, Father. We, humankind and creation, are to be glorified together.

In this section of Paul's letter to the church in Rome he has great concerns about the sins of the flesh. When he refers to the flesh Paul is focusing on sin, when he refers to the body Paul is neutral, when he refers to the Spirit, Paul is seeing humankind as living in accordance with God. He is not as nuanced in his discussions of creation, but he is clear that creation and humankind are God's own and will be redeemed at the final

harvest. So if it matters what we do with our bodies, whether we live according to the will of God or counter to the will of God, then it matters how we live with creation.

There are those who believe that our lives are ultimately to be lived in heaven, and that we will ascend to heaven when called, leaving behind the remains of a dying world; this errant belief is much like the scene in an action movie where the star jumps out of the car to safety just before the car plummets over a cliff in a ball of fire. But for Paul, redemption is for humankind and creation so we need to care for both. For God, who created humankind and creation, it is good, very good.

Perhaps that is why we need Holy Hikes, because we no longer sense the connection between God, humankind, and creation; because we were led to believe that the world would be left behind as we float away on a cloud.

If our bodies matter, so too does creation. Paul, in Corinthians, refers to our bodies as temples for the Spirit. Creation is also a temple for the Spirit of God.

In central Pennsylvania there is a years old fight against a proposed pipeline that is to carry natural gas that comes from fracking within the state. As the company continues to negotiate for the land rights along the proposed pathway I suspect they underestimated the faith of the nuns in a convent that is along the route. The sisters in this convent said that it would be against God's will to negotiate for the right of way. And then they took a stand, in the corn field that was to be path for the pipeline they created an outdoor chapel and consecrated it, naming it a house of God. It will be up to the courts to decide if this house of God will stand in the way of the pipeline; however, at the final harvest I suspect that God will praise their actions.

Jacob blessed the place where he lay, he called it Bethel, the house of God. We live in the house of God, we are surrounded by the Spirit. This is not about the pejorative of being a tree hugger, this is about loving God, and loving all that God has created.

So while it may seem odd to me that we need to be reminded by Holy Hikes, and other activities, that God's creation is to be loved and cared for, so be it if that is what it takes. And truly, we will protect the things we love.

Amen,