

Easter 6: Rogationtide
St. John 14:15-21
Acts 17:22-31
May 21, 2017
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

“A Little Goes A Long Way”

“The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things.”

To make a good garden requires many patient and small steps over the course of time... *What sort of gardener are you?*

Today is Rogation Sunday. Rogation Sunday and the days following were a time for a big procession. In our Anglican roots it was known as, *“beating the bounds of the parish,”* marching around the boundaries of the parish, likely the county in which they found themselves. It involved parades of the faithful, young and old, walking and carrying torches and banners of many of the saints, with a dragon at the front of the processional representing Pontius Pilate and a Lion right behind him, representing Christ. Now if there was a dragon involved, you can imagine that a banner with the visage of that popular English saint, St. George, was not far behind in the procession. Blessings were given over the crops and of course, as society became more civilized and less agrarian, such blessings were offered over the gardens of those gathered during this springtime festival. It was a way of honoring not only seedtime, but also nature itself, praying for both

adequate rain and sunlight to make the crops grow and be healthy and that the gardens would be a delight to behold.

Now all of this is to indicate that from time immemorial, human beings 1.) saw their dependency upon God and nature for success; and that 2.) they saw man as having some role, if not "control" over the success of such ventures as farms and gardens. Skill played a role. The quality of your land and soil were another issue.

In other words, human beings saw their actions as having an effect upon nature and the environment in which they lived. It was a balance between human beings as stewards of what God had given them, and God the creator, preserver, as the moving force in nature and of our environment as well as our lives and spirits.

As we observe Rogationtide in 2017, it may seem a far cry from some antiquated ritual observance to appease the forces of nature. Rather, it tugs at all of the same themes that are crucial for our own time as we face climate change.

To mention the word climate change is to sound as though I am going to be political, but I must assert that concern for our environment transcends political beliefs and parties and is an essential part of our Christian stewardship. We ought to pray for the creation in which we live, and honor it each day, each moment with our actions to care for and protect it from harm and abuse. Creation does not belong to us. We are, as Jesus put it, *tenants*.

There are those who view the environment as an unlimited resource that belongs to them alone. As such, it is ripe for their exploitation and use as they see fit, and as will benefit them and those dependent upon their largesse.

To speak of stewardship and us being stewards of this creation is to admit that it does not belong to us, but that we have been placed in it for a brief period of time and that it is for our temporary use. There is no such thing as true “property”, but rather as twentieth century philosophers like Ralph Borsodi called it, “trusterty.” We hold what we have been given to use in trust, a trust from God. As Christians, we must embrace this idea. Surely we came into the world with nothing and we shall leave it the same way. This is not far from the understanding of the author of Ecclesiastes. [Ecclesiastes 2:18-19]: *“I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me —and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.”* Chapter two of the book of the Acts of the Apostles talks about everyone sharing everything with others in the Christian community: *“they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... All the believers were together and held everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.”*

So how have you tended the garden you have been given? It is Spring again, and we all have another chance to create beauty and peace out of the remains of death and grey that was winter. The cold is gone. The rains have prepared the soil. What will your garden look like this year?

Our actions effect others, no matter how small. Driving down a residential street, one notices the well-kept gardens and the flowers at this time of the year. They stand out. They bring a moment of hope, brightness, beauty and peace, however fleeting if you look. They are there perhaps to suit the desires

and wants of the gardeners or perhaps to make the world a better place in a small way, but they touch the lives of many passing by with their beauty. Small house, small garden, but an important impact, blessing others quietly!

When we hear of climate change, we wonder about it on days like last Thursday and Friday when in May, temperatures climbed to nearly a hundred degrees in many places in Connecticut. Yet we feel so small, like a grain of sand on a large beach, and think, *'what can my actions do to reduce this problem, if it be true?'*

We need to each of us believe that what we do, even in small ways, makes a difference. Being a good steward will save a landfill from centuries of problems by *not* disposing of our plastic in them, but recycling it for other uses. Being a good steward is about thinking how our actions effect others, and being considerate of persons yet unborn or unseen to us around the world in third world countries. The world is not our apple for us to consume alone. It belongs to God and also to our fellow travellers on this earth. Using more than our fair share of the resources of this planet may have consequences unseen to you, in a distant land. *God desires us to share with those who have not, and to be just and fair in how we use the gifts God has entrusted us with.*

This means being thoughtful about how much water and paper you use, how much gasoline and electricity. It means trying not to be wasteful.

Living as Good stewards is not about being anxious about every little thing you do. It is about the way we live and the habits we form. Following the commandments of God is not about being anxious all the time about whether you have been

good or bad, but it is about living in harmony with the creation and the other people in your life whom God has given you.

We may feel as though the few small things we do are inconsequential. The world is so large, and our part in it so small.

Yet if everyone in our congregation does one small act of kindness each day, one action to conserve and better our environment, consider then the impact of our actions as a group for the good which God commands us to do in our world. God sees the difference we make, even if sometimes we cannot and even when such little things seem inconsequential. They do add up. God multiplies them.

What sort of gardener are you? Do your actions bring peace, beauty and fairness into a reality for yourself and others to experience?

Each morning and evening when I go out, I pick up litter in my parking lot. Some of it comes from neighbors. Some of it the winds blow there. I used to get angry and judgmental about it. I thought to myself, 'How can anyone treat their home like a trash can? How can they be so inconsiderate of others?' And then it dawned on me: if I want my small world to be a place of peace and beauty, I can make it so by my small actions of picking up a plastic bag that has blown there in the wind, or a few wrappers laying on the ground. My small actions can make a difference in how others perceive their environment. My actions can bring on an experience of serenity to others who do not see the ugliness of litter. It isn't about judging the actions of others or looking down on them for their behavior and feeling superior to them. It doesn't matter if they know who picked up the paper, in fact, it is better they do not. Yet if someone sees me do it, maybe they will be inspired to do

likewise. What matters is that the litter is cleaned up. And then there will be no litter in our small corner of the world! It isn't about getting credit for doing the right thing. It is about the results of our actions. God sees and God will give you the credit.

"...And he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.'"

God is out there to be found in our creation. As we go through life we may grope on some days to find God. God is often found in the small things, in the small gardens we create in life, in the small acts of kindness. Remember that no matter how small the action, it is of great consequence in the eyes of God and the experience of others you may never meet. A little goes a long way! AMEN