

Thoughts from a “Potential Troublemaker”
Oak Grove Presbyterian Church, Rev. Dr. Anne Fisher
April 26, 2020 Psalm 8
50th Anniversary of Earth Day

This week we celebrated the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. When we measure time, there are different perspectives. Sometimes it is the way you look at numbers. For example, the people of Israel used specific numbers to indicate concepts. The number of tribes of Israel and disciples were both listed as twelve but it also meant the forming of a close-knit group. Moses and his band of Hebrews left Egypt and wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days. In the Bible, forty has come to be known as meaning a very long time. So, to say we have been setting a special day apart to highlight our planet and how precarious it is with overuse for fifty years, means that we have been sounding our concerns for our earth for a very long time. We have been doing it longer than it took for the Hebrews to form the nation of Israel. We have been sounding the alarm about our earth longer than the generation that passed from leaving Egypt to entering the Promised Land. We have made progress but we have not reached the Promised Land of renewable resources and responsible consumption.

Today’s reading is a song of praise in the Psalms. In this time, when we are in pause but our seasons are not in pause, imagine yourself as the psalmist on a lovely spring day sitting in a meadow and taking in glory of their surroundings. asking the timeless questions of who are we and how do we fit into the greater scheme of things. A reading from Psalm 8...

O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

Out of the mouths of babes and infants, you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Throughout my years, I have been called many things -- good student, friend, daughter, wife, mother, pastor. There is one name that I was called that I perhaps hold onto with a bit too much pride. That name is Potential Troublemaker. It was one of the early Earth days and I was in Middle School. Many of us decided to walk to school that day which was about 1½ miles away. I know the buses still ran so we were not saving energy. But why not? We picked up trash along the way. There were about 25 of us athletes, cool kids' student council folks and the rest of us. When we reached our school about three minutes after the late bell rang, we were met by a livid principal who immediately ushered us into the auditorium and proceeded to dress us down calling us irresponsible and the infamous label, potential troublemakers. He then sentenced us to an after-school detention.

Now I was the kind of kid who basically tried to stay out of trouble but that day my friends and I bravely took our punishment knowing that at least for that day we were one of the "bad kids!" We were no longer those quiet girls who did everything right, we were now potential troublemakers.

I did not know much about the need for an Earth day before that. I lived in a coal and steel town. I did know that if wind blew in a certain direction a fine coal dust would be all over the patio furniture. I did not know the complex economic dependency of the fossil fuel and industrial age. But I did know that people who worked at the mill would drive their old beat up clunkers to work because the chemicals spewing out of the smoke stacks would corrode the paint on their cars. We did not think about what else those particulates corroded like lungs and soft tissue. Quite frankly, to my fifteen-year-old brain,

I was more enamored of being called a potential troublemaker than being an agent for change in treating our planet.

As the years past, I began to see the relationship of caring for our earth and my faith in God who saw creation as good. As my faith and trust in God grew and matured, I began to realize that being a troublemaker for the earth's sake is not only about self-preservation or responding to my own guilty behavior for all those plastics I threw away, it is about expressing my faith, loving my neighbor and loving God.

I look to the psalmist who, in gratitude of being alive, is overcome with a joy of the world. The writer tries to put into words the overwhelming feeling of God's goodness in creation. We know that feeling, as we look at a stunning vista from a mountaintop. We know that feeling of awe-inspiring wonder gazing upon a newborn child. We know that feeling when we look into the night sky and seeing the multitude of stars in the sky, realize our own insignificance compared to the enormity of the universe. Who are we in the great magnificence of the world? In those moments we are no longer masters of our fate and our surroundings. We are humbled by the intricacies of our world and the vast expanse around us.

We respond to these moments by living our lives in reverence of our surroundings. We are called to walk lightly in ways that try to mitigate irreparable harm. We are not perfect. We take much from this planet. We have found ourselves dependent on things that we take and cannot replace. In this context, we are called to be troublemakers.

We are simply not to shrug and be passive thinking someone else is responsible. Not only do we have potential to make trouble, we also have the potential to find solutions. God has made us a little lower than the angels. We are endowed with minds to find solutions, to be creative and to work with our planet. God has given us the capacity not to simply go along with the ride but to be able to do something to keep God's creation good and hold it in trust. We have the potential of being active in the choices we make and the life that we choose to live.

The Psalmist writes this song of praise knowing full well the dangers that occur in God's creation. Throughout our world, there are threats of violence

and disease. There are natural calamities whose power of wind and storm can destroy homes and our very lives. The power of our natural world is great. And it demands our respect.

As Christians, we believe that God enters into creation. God becomes one of us. In Jesus Christ, God enters into the fullness of creation. Jesus shows us a better way to live. Jesus fulfills his potential as a troublemaker. At least in the views of the establishment. They try to still him, but as we proclaim this day and every day, not even death could hold him.

In faith, we see the world as a gift that has God given. It is gift to hold and enjoy to wonder and to respect.

Since that earth Day so long ago I am not really sure how much trouble I have caused in protecting our planet. In true confession, my energies have been sporadic at most. But I am aware that our earth is where life is meant to flourish. I am aware that what I do and what I do not do have lasting impacts on this place where we live.

I am grateful that Oak Grove is fulfilling its potential at being troublemakers when we direct our attention to being responsible when it comes to God's creation, such as our use of solar energy and our efforts to recycle and compost. It is sometimes cumbersome and requires extra effort. Our promotion of living with respect to the world helps in our own small way of making a difference. Whether we are considered troublemakers or not, as followers of the risen Christ, we have a mandate to love one another and also to love what God created. In loving God, we need to love and care for what God has let us use for our time here on earth. God has given us a magnificent creation.

Thanks be to God. Amen