

“Everything Is Holy: Our World”
Psalm 104: 1-5, 10-15

A couple of weeks ago, I watched the Netflix documentary “My Octopus Teacher.” It is the great story of a filmmaker, Craig Foster, who was burned out by the intense demands of his job and who found an incredible teacher in a sea creature. He made the commitment to dive each day for a year without a wetsuit or an oxygen tank. According to Wikipedia, “Foster began free-diving in a cold underwater kelp forest at a remote location in False Bay, near Cape Town, South Africa...He started to document his experiences and, in time, met a curious young octopus that captured his attention. He decided to keep visiting her, tracking her movements every day for a year to win the animal’s trust. They form a bond where she plays with Foster and allows him into her world to see how she sleeps, lives, and eats. In the film, Foster describes the impact of his relationship with the octopus on his life...Foster describes the effect of this mentorship-like relationship the octopus provided him, teaching him a lesson on the fragility of life and humanity’s connection with nature.”

In addition to the beauty of the scenes of the kelp forest, there was the inner beauty which this film presented. When we as humans see and feel our deep connection to the world around us, something amazing happens within us. We are transformed to feel the magnitude and awe of creation. In those experiences of awe, we are transformed from our small selves to see ourselves as part of a magnificent web of creation.

The beauty of the earth was one of the life-saving graces we experienced during the height of the pandemic and times of social isolation. Being out in nature or even just looking out the window to behold the beauty of the earth was one of the most healing activities many of us rediscovered. In the frenzy and fear of the pandemic, looking at the trees and their resilience reminded me of how being rooted in what nurtures us can help us withstand the toughest of our storms.

Psalm 104 is a great reminder of the importance of God's creation for our wellbeing. It is an amazing poem about God as the creator and sustainer of the universe. This was the common understanding of the Israelites and also of the other cultures around them. The psalmist knew about the intricate interconnectedness and subtle interdependence of air, soil, water, plants, and animals, including humans.

The psalmist knew the truth revealed in the etymological connection between the Hebrew word for "humanity" (da Adam) and the word for "ground" (adamâ): Human beings really are creatures of the earth. The origin and destiny of humankind is closely connected to the origin and destiny of the earth. The same truth is revealed in the connection between the English word human and the Latin word humus, "soil." Science reveals to us some of the mathematical formulas that govern our universe and how connected life really is. Faith helps us to be in awe and to remember the importance of that connection. This is not about protecting the earth so that we can continue to consume its resources. Much of our concern for the future of the earth comes from our desire to maintain our current standard of living without trashing things so terribly or depleting natural resources so severely that we cannot pass the same style of life on to our children. Our primary concern is ourselves, and our major motivation is fear. The famous Riverside Church pastor William Sloane

Coffin once wrote, "We have divorced nature from nature's God. We view nature essentially as a toolbox...What we need beyond caution is reverence. Unless nature is 're-sanctified' we will never see nature as worthy of ethical considerations similar to those that govern human relations."

Psalms 104 invites us to a deeper level of connection to God's creation. This is not only about our selfish concern for our survival but it is because of our love for God that we would see God's creation as sacred. It is about seeing the sacred in God's handiwork. For the psalmist, relating to the world begins with praising God. The motivation is not fear but rejoicing in the Lord (vv. 33-34). Praise involves the acknowledgment of God's presence and love for all living things.

Taking the psalmist as an example, we would have to conclude that healing our connection to the world begins with the realization that the plants, the trees, and all of nature are our kin. We are connected to them through the energy of all of creation, the one we often call God.

Psalms 104 affirms that God has made every arrangement and provision for the life of the world. The only problem is when we disrupt God's design and destroy the delicate balance God has put in place. Our call to view the world as sacred and to care for God's creation does not mean that we are all called to sell our homes and live in the woods and go back to the Stone Age. The poet Wendell Berry, in speaking of the earth, speaks of the essence of sacrament. "I do not mean to suggest we can live harmlessly or strictly at our own expense; we depend upon other creatures and survive by their deaths. To live, we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation...When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration In such desecration we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness and others to want."

The invitation is for all of us to see how we can love our world as a gift from God for all of creation. We are also invited to let God's creation bring us healing so that we may see the sacredness of all of life.

Today we celebrate communion, and so I am going to invite you to bring out your communion elements and as you hold them in your hand, you may close your eyes and imagine that you are standing in the field or orchard where the plants were grown for the making of your bread and your drink. Feel the air around you as you observe the plants...Take a deep breath and give thanks to God for the amazing bounty of the earth...Now imagine the people who come and harvest the grain and the fruit...Take a deep breath and give thanks for their hard labor...Now imagine the people who gather up, process, and transport the grain and the fruit...Take a deep breath and give thanks for their time and energy...Now imagine the people who sell the bread and the juice or wine...Take a deep breath and give thanks for their skills and efforts...Now imagine those who baked and prepared these elements for today, whether it is yourself or someone else in your family...Take a deep breath and give thanks for all the connections it took to bring you to this moment of sharing...Let the journey of your bread and cup remind you of your own connections to God, to others, and to the universe... "O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all." Amen.