

WGUMC April 20, 2014 Easter Sunday  
Matthew 28:1-10 and Colossians 1:15-20

Charles Wesley wrote, “Christ the Lord is risen today. Earth and heaven in chorus say...” So both earth and heaven celebrate Easter today. And that means that we hairless apes aren’t the only part of God’s creation caught up in Jesus’ resurrection.

I like to call Matthew the Green Gospel because it's the only Gospel that gives us the earth's story along with the Easter story. In Matthew, we read that the sun was shrouded and darkness fell on the whole land from noon until 3 p.m. as Jesus hung from the cross on Good Friday. And at the very the moment of his death, the earth shook, the rocks were split, and the tombs were opened.

The earth that got involved in the crucifixion, also played a role in Jesus’ resurrection. On the first day of the week, as Mary and the other Mary were coming to the tomb, the sun was just dawning. In the stillness of that hour, in the half-light,

as the Mary's were half awake, suddenly the earth began to shake, as if the earth itself had something important to say, as if the earth wanted to pray. Listen:

I am the cave that served as the tomb  
that became the womb that birthed you.  
I am the ground that heaves and shakes  
as creatures wake to greet you.  
I am the rock, the chosen stone  
set to guard your bones, 'til I free you.  
I am the sun in the eastern skies.  
Watch me arise to crown you.  
I am the dew that falls on the grass.  
When your feet pass, I bathe you.  
I am the lily, alive for today,  
like Solomon arrayed, to adorn you.  
I am the lark, the first of the birds  
to hear your Word and sing for you.  
I am the deer that stately pose  
among the hedgerows to salute you.  
I am the willow, growing old in years,  
and smiling through tears, bow down to worship you.  
Yes, I am the soul of this good earth  
awaiting rebirth in you and through you and for you.  
Amen.

Easter Day falling on the same weekend as Earth Day reminds us that God's plan of salvation is not just about us. Something that gets lost in our Easter celebrations is that the

new creation in Christ is for the *whole* creation. Read about it in the Letter to the Colossians. There we hear about the cosmic implications of what God is doing in Jesus Christ: in Christ, through Christ, and for Christ, all things in heaven and on earth were created and in Christ all things hold together [Colossians 1:16-17].

The Christ in Colossians 1 and in John 1 and in Ephesians 1 is sometimes called the Cosmic Christ. This is the One who is both the source and the life force holding the creation together. Now if all things were created in Christ, then it matters to the life of the cosmos what happens in the life of Christ. I'll tell you what happens: Easter happens. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. Alleluia!

For the earth and for all of us, that's good news. But is it The Good News? Weren't we told that the gospel is the Good News of our personal salvation? What does that have to do with the rest of creation? And, yes, it's true that, for most of

recorded history, man has needed saving *from* nature.

Hurricanes, floods, fire, famine: for centuries, we thought that the earth was going to hell, so we had to find a way to get to heaven.

But that isn't what the Bible says. God is reconciling all things in Christ, things in heaven *and things on earth*. In order to do that, God starts by reconciling with us. For God so loved the world that he sent the Son to save us [John 3:16], because God knew there was no hope for the rest of the world unless there is hope for us.

It's only taken 20 centuries, but we are finally discovering the truth that has been in the Bible all along: that God's plan of salvation begins with us, but it doesn't end with us. Our salvation is the crucial first step in the new creation but it's a pretty big step. As much death and destruction as there is out there, there is even more in here. For instance, we can't very well help God care for the earth, if we aren't caring for our own

bodies. We can't manage ecosystems if we can't manage to live peacefully in our own families. We can't clean up the toxic waste in our lakes, rivers and bays if we deny the toxic waste slurping around in our own souls. In fact, most of our environmental problems have their root in spiritual ones: personal sin and selfishness, pride and greed, fear and ignorance, cruelty and apathy.

Until we declare our souls a Superfund site and get to work on getting out of ourselves and back into a right relationship with God, there is little hope that we can live in right relationships with anyone or anything else. There is no grace or peace or justice out there that doesn't start in here.

Salvation is about beginning again, about getting back to where we belong. Where do we belong? The Book of Genesis says that we came from the dust of the ground. Adam or *adam* comes from the Hebrew word for ground. So this story is literally true. The biologists tell us that we are all made of dust,

the dust of exploding stars. We have indeed come from the ground and in order to restore our relationship with God and with the earth, we need to be grounded again. And I mean that physically and spiritually. I'm not sure that it's a coincidence that the words "soil" and "soul" differ by just one letter.

I regularly need grounding, so yesterday I went out to Veggielution, the community farm that raises produce for low-income folks at Emma Prusch Park here in San Jose. Our Building Hope Team has been out there for weeks now building accessible pathways so that parents with strollers and people in wheelchairs can get closer to the dirt. That's where we can begin to reconnect with our roots (pun intended) and rediscover our rightful place as creatures in God's good creation.

Knowing our place is important. Knowing that God does not belong to us, but that we belong to God, knowing that the earth is the Lord's and it is not ours to destroy—these are

necessary first steps in God's grand plan of salvation. And Jesus can help us take them.

Consider Jesus, who considered the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, called himself the true Vine and the Living Water, who calmed the storm, taught on a mountain and prayed in a garden. For him, the good news was always set in the context of the good creation, as if Jesus were saying: "Pay attention to this old earth that is groaning for rebirth. By first seeing the rebirth in nature, you can learn to seek it in yourselves."

That's what we really want from Easter, isn't it: for the resurrection to be happening in us? But for some of us it's going to take more than an earthquake to get us to notice it. In Matthew, the earth started shaking on Easter morning, so that the Mary's coming to the tomb wouldn't miss the miracle.

Earthquakes can be hard to miss around here. But I wonder if they really do shake us up enough. Even if we think

we're ready for the Big One, that doesn't mean we're ready for the resurrection. Are we really ready for Christ to come into our lives, change the way we live, transform the way we love, and make us a new creation?

Better get your Easter kits ready, because the earth keeps sending us warning signals. Drought is not as dramatic as an earthquake, but it's getting our attention. Global warming is a creeping problem, but some of us are gradually waking up to the idea that it's time for some resurrection. That's what makes the Easter message so urgent for us. We can't save the planet if we won't let God save us.

Don't wait for the Big One to shake you out of your tomb of complacency. Let the Risen Christ shake your world. Then the stone that has been blocking you from being a part of God's plan of salvation, that stone will roll away. And when you finally let the resurrection happen in you, believe it or not, it will start happening for the rest of creation, too. For that we



can thank the Cosmic Christ, in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through whom God was pleased to reconcile to Godself all things, whether on earth or in heaven.

[Col 1:19-20]

Christ the Lord is risen today...Earth and heaven in chorus say...Alleluia!