

Sermon for September 10, 2017 (Creation2A) “Grounded”

(based on Exodus 3:1-12 and Matthew 12:38-40)

It felt like it could hardly get any worse. Everyone around him was hiding, or running, begging for healing, or asking for miracles. The authorities kept pushing, pressing, ramping up the fear factor. They wanted Jesus to show his papers. They wanted the Son of Man and prince of Heaven to prove his citizenship. And Jesus said, the sign you want is not the sign you'll get. I'm going underground.

I've stood with those scribes and pharisees. I have gone on my knees to pray for miracles, and I have scanned the sky for spiritual fireworks. Have you ever watched a toddler, overdue for naptime, screech out a demand and then completely melt down when you don't fulfill it? In my own spiritual journey, I have sometimes yelled and shaken my fist at God, and made my own embarrassing demands. And Jesus says, “you want a sign? Think of me, three days in the earth.”

The Hebrew word for soil is *adamah*. So the name of the first human becomes “Adam,” person of earth. The soil is our beginning, our foundation, the literal stuff of life—and the substance that enfolds our bodies in death. It is the place where the solid permanence of rock and the subtle transformations of rot perform the invisible, daily miracles that make life possible, that nourish us and keep us whole. When I touch earth, I get dirty. When I harvest a carrot or pull a shovel from the mud, I am smeared with the substance of graves. I have to reckon with the reality of loss, the promise of decay.

John Michael Grier writes about climate change. He says that the thing that stands in the way, the thing that prevents most people from embracing the choices that will save us all, is the “squick factor”—the refusal to touch anything that reminds us of decay and death. It's the impulse that keeps more people from composting. It's why we like to buy meat without skin or bones, wrapped in plastic, on rectangular styrofoam trays that will never break down and return to the earth. God forbid we be reminded that meat has bones. It's why we have developed an American industry of well-paid

strangers who handle and dispose of the bodies of our beloved dead. We are afraid to touch death. The more we can separate ourselves from it, the more we call ourselves civilized. And it is destroying our planet.

Yet God has blessed us with natural systems that reclaim and redeem everything that dies. If you bend down and touch the earth, if you spend time touching skin and bones, if you watch what the earth does to regenerate after a forest fire or other disasters, you learn that this beautiful created world is, every day and every night, engaged in the practice of resurrection. In our arrogance, we have assumed we knew better, and we have damaged the earth's resilience. But just as God can transform death into life, God has blessed us with the capacity for change. You and I can DO something about about all this.

The earth is calling us back to honest engagement, with urgent voices we cannot afford to ignore. So I'll make this short. Here are some things you can do:

- 1) Touch the earth, its soil, its living and dying creatures and plants. Let it touch you, and welcome the stain of berries, the smell of low tide, the dirt on your skin.

- 2) Let the food you eat, the clothes you wear, and the tools you use bind you back to the earth. Think of the miles and energy spent to bring you food and goods from far away. You know the old saying: "use it up, wear it out, make do, or do without." Or maybe you're more familiar with "reduce, re-use, recycle." Add another word to that: RETHINK. Stop and think before every purchase. Buy things made as locally as possible, go for durable instead of cheap, and eat what's in season (even if you're really tired of squash). Every dollar you spend is a vote for the world you believe in.

- 3) Honor the earth, and honor the people who live most closely with the earth's wisdom. Support the rights of indigenous people, including their right to be stewards of lands and waters they recognize as sacred. Native people are the first to be devastated and displaced by climate change, and the last to be recognized. Do what you can to change this, and challenge your legislators as well.

4) Reduce, re-use, recycle, rethink...there's one final word to add: RESTORE. All of us in this room have lived long enough to participate, unthinkingly, in acts of earthly destruction. Jesus came because God so loved the world—and we have been part of the crucifying mob, causing pollution and extinction. So we are called, as followers of Jesus Christ, to be Repairers of the Breach, healers of this broken world. Plant more trees and tend more gardens. Clean up more rivers. Use the voice you have and the energy you have to hold yourself and others accountable for your impact on the earth. Act and speak on behalf of Creation. The survival of the earth, embodied witness of resurrection, depends on it.

Oh, and take off your shoes. You're standing on Holy Ground.

--Preached by Rev. Holly S. Morrison

Phippsburg Congregational Church, UCC

Phippsburg, Maine

(The following was included in our shared prayers during worship.)

A Psalm of Thanksgiving (For Those in the Path of Irma)

O God of all creation,
Your love is stronger than the strongest winds,
Your mercy deeper than the deepest floods,
In gratitude we offer up our praise that your grace will be made known,
In those who share these days.

For those who stay behind to tend the sick, we thank you.
For those who answer questions about hardware and cardboard and water, we thank you.
For those who drive buses to take confused seniors to safety, we thank you.
For those who offer words of comfort to the lonely, the frightened, the terrified, we thank you.
For those who give themselves to shelter the displaced, we thank you.
For those who share their meager resources with those whose needs are greater, we thank you.
For those who read maps on flickering screens to provide words of warning, we thank you.
For these and all those who show us your love, your mercy, we thank you.

O God of all creation,
Your presence, your grace will be shown,
And for this we offer up our praise.

--Rev. John H. Danner, Sanibel Congregational Church, UCC, Sanibel, Florida