



“Love Your Mother”

Psalm 8

Julie R. Harley – October 4, 2009 – First United Church of Oak Park

I’d like to teach you a prayer you can use every day. It’s from Anne Lamott, and I’ve added some gestures to help you remember it.

(Put your hands palms together, at chest level) Help me, help me, help me.

(Point your arms upward and face the sky) Thank you, thank you, thank you.

(Place one hand on your heart and one on your stomach) Please, please, please.

(Place your hands waist-high at your sides, palms up) Wow!

When we pray for help, we pray for ourselves and our own needs. When we pray “thank you,” we offer God our gratitude. When we pray “please,” we ask for God to intervene in the life of the world or other people. When we say, “Wow,” we are simply amazed by what God has done.

Sometimes a day goes by without a “wow” moment. Sometime several days go by without a wow moment. But I said wow every single day this week, as I watched Ken Burns’ documentary on PBS called “The National Parks: America’s Best Idea.”

As I watched footage of Yellowstone, Yosemite, Denali, the Grand Tetons and Glacier National Parks, I was stunned by the beauty and magnificence of nature.

I found it to be one of the most religious programs I’ve ever seen on TV. Over and over again, people who were interviewed about the parks said, “I’m really not very religious, but when I look out over the Grand Canyon, I feel this must be the work of God.”

The wonder of these ancient, wild places inspired people like Abraham Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt and John Muir to establish the national parks, to ensure that they would

remain unmarred by billboards, lights, expressways and fast food restaurants. Because they were deeply moved by nature's beauty, they became stewards of the earth.

We hear this same astonished admiration in Psalm 8: *O Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. When I look at the heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and the stars that you have established, who are we that you are mindful of us?*

Being immersed in nature reminds us that there is something much greater than we are, and there is nothing we can do but sit back and say, "Wow!"

The poet Rilke said, "Being here is magnificent."

e.e. cummings said, "I thank you God for most this amazing day."

Even non-religious scientists are moved to words of praise when they contemplate Creation.

E.O. Wilson said, "Biophilia (the love of biological life) is a natural emotion."

Stephen Jay Gould said if evolution were made into a movie it could be called, "It's a Wonderful Life."

Psalm 8 also reminds us that even though we are small in comparison with the grandeur of Creation, God has entrusted nature's care to us.

You have given us dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under our feet.

We are responsible for Creation's care, and yet we are completely dependent on that same Creation for life.

Environmental stewardship is like loving your mother.

You wouldn't be here without her.

She taught you much of what you know.

She not only nurtures you, she tries to keep you in line.

Nature is a real *mother*, and she will punish us if we abuse our privileges.

My own mother was a thoughtful, nurturing, giving and affirming person – the best mother anyone could have. And yet I was afraid of her. I was afraid of doing something that would disappoint her.

When I was in college, my mother was my best reference when I was applying for jobs. When potential employers would call the house to talk with me, my mom would

get on the phone and tell them how talented and intelligent I was, and how glad they would be if they hired me for the job. It worked!

One summer I got a job at an office where my mother had told my new boss about all my exceptional qualities. A few months before, I had started smoking, and so one day I was smoking at my desk (remember when people could actually do that?). My boss came up to me and saw me with the cigarette. All he said was, “Does your mother know you’re doing that?” I simply said, “No,” and I put down that cigarette. It was the last cigarette I ever smoked. I knew mom would not approve.

As think about loving Mother Nature, there are two sides to consider.

On one hand, there is the sacramental relationship between humans and Creation. As we see frequently in scripture, there is continuity between the world and God. We experience God in nature, we see God at work in Creation, and in Hopkins’ words: “The world is charged with the grandeur of God.”

But there is also a prophetic relationship between humans and Creation. There is a distance between the world and God in the places where we have destroyed or desecrated Mother Earth. We have treated the earth like Kleenex – use it and discard it. But that wasteful consumption is now catching up to us.

Climate change is the global issue of the 21st century. Climate change is the unifying challenge of our generation – it’s our World War II. But the enemy this time is not the Germans and the Japanese: the enemy is much closer to home. It is us.

In a moral sense, global warming is as important in the 21st century as the abolition of slavery was in the 19th century. Decades ago, blacks were not treated as full human beings. They were simply slaves who were essential to the economy.

Today, we do not treat the earth’s resources with dignity and value. We use and abuse the Earth for the sake of our comfortable lifestyle.

More people today are dying from the effects of climate change than terrorism.

Only **by loving our mother** will we be able to change our thinking and change our behavior so that we do not destroy what gives us life.

When we see the world in a sacramental sense – as something that connects us with God – we then begin to see the eco-justice movement is also a prophetic plea. When we harm the earth, we lose our connection with God.

When we make small but persevering decisions to protect the earth – by walking or biking or taking public transportation to church instead of driving a car (which I hope many of you did today) – by upgrading the lighting in the our Nursery School and church school rooms to more energy efficient technology (which we did this year) – by phasing out the print edition of the Messenger Bell and moving toward only digital delivery of the newsletter (which I hope we'll do next year) – we have a spiritual purpose.

Our purpose is to stay connected to God. Our purpose is to love our mother.

Look again at Psalm 8. Of all the species named in this poem – the sheep and the oxen, the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and whatever passes along the paths of the seas --- we are the only species that knows the story of Creation. We are the only species who are called to be stewards or caretakers of creation.

We are the adults here, not the adolescents. We can no longer consume the earth's resources without limits. We live within nature, not above it or apart from it. We are all connected.

Love your mother, not just by going to the national parks – but by seeing that without the natural world we have nothing. As we look at the pews in this sanctuary, we know they came from wood. That wood came from a tree. That tree was fed by a leaf, which was fed by light from the sun, which is at the center of the earth's orbit. We are all connected.

Fifty years ago Buzz Aldrin became the first human to stand on the surface of the moon. He was not alone. He brought with him communion elements that had been blessed at his Presbyterian church back home in Webster, Texas, where he served as an elder and clerk of session.

As Buzz Aldrin stood on the moon, he took the sacrament of Christ's body and blood that had been blessed on earth and he received them in the heavens . . . a quarter million miles away. The sacrament we receive today is not limited to this place, this time, the people who are gathered here. The sacrament of communion connects us to believers around the world, to the world itself, and to all the planets, moons and stars that God has set in motion.

When we look at your heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and the stars that you have established, all we can say sometimes is, "Wow." Amen.

