

Sermon – Sunday, September 10, 2023

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Streaks of red, blue, grey, black, and brown zip about the feeders in the back yard. My writing room window offers a “birds eye view” of the variety of guests who come to be fed. Cardinals, blue jays, chick-a-dees, juncos, sparrows, and pigeons share the seed. It’s sometimes hard to discern the aviators, but it is a delight to observe the “regulars” and the “migrants” who bring joy of song and presence to the feeding stations and watering receptacles around the yard. Squirrels boldly dart up the clothes pole and latch onto the feeder, though they aren’t known to be the most generous in sharing what’s offered. Bill Murray, the ground hog (have you seen the movie *Caddyshack*?...) and the Hoppers, William and Hedda (TV/film stars from the 50s) sometimes partake of the clover or wilted lettuce leaves that are tossed under the feeders. Though I’ve no way to tell, there seems to be one squirrel in particular, who sits in the crook of the branches of a dead tree, keenly attuned to the activity below. I don’t speak “squirrel”, but have often shared with the furry, fluffy-tailed cutie, that I consider him/her to be the sentinel of our backyard. Truth is, the little darling probably wants to be first to the feeder to grab sunflower seeds...

Recently a flurry of activity caught my eye. It was a frenzied flight of sparrows as they made a mass exodus from the platform feeder to the safety of the fully leafed bushes in the neighbor’s yard. Purposefully looking out the window, I saw the culprit. A large hawk circled around and landed in a nearby treetop. Understanding its intent made my own heart beat a little faster. Seed and grain aren’t a large part of a hawk’s diet. I do understand they, too, need to eat. But, not on my watch, not in my peaceful space. In a frenzy myself, I tripped down the stairs, rushing through the kitchen and out the back door, kicking off my flip flops as I ran with my arms waving in a circle like a windmill. I think it’s likely that if predators such as this can smirk in satisfaction, this one was doing so as it sat in the tree top for a bit, while I startled the neighbors with my shouting and motions. I had no desire to see feathers and fallout scattered about my backyard. As the predator took flight, I carefully retraced my steps to the back door. In doing so, I noticed a lone sparrow sitting in the base of the feeder. Frozen in fear it couldn’t fly to safety. As I approached, it finally escaped to the shelter of the bushes. Relieved, at least for the time being, I retrieved my flip flops and came back inside.

The ecumenical Season of Creation began on September 1 and continues till the Feast of St. Francis on October 4th. This year’s theme is Let Justice and Peace Flow. Please take a moment to consider that Creation is more than human beings. It includes the vast and incomprehensible habitation of the earth, sky and sea so beyond our measure of scope; the very planet itself.

SO YOU, MORTAL, in my estimation, humbling words- I have made a sentinel for the house of Israel. Humbling and esteemed, privileged, trusting, awesome, challenging, powerful words. Loving words, commanding, yet not issued without assurance from the one whose promise for the house of Israel, the seeds of the earth, that the decree is not one that desires death, but life. Ezekiel, a prophet. Bound to face confrontation, resistance, anger, and misunderstanding-as Pastor Randi spoke of Jeremiah last week... There may be those among us, here in the pew and those with whom we associate, who don’t cringe when the mention of “confrontation”(not violence) and its necessity comes into play. Ponder perhaps the call of prophet and the ability to prophecy...My sense is that most of us are much more comfortable with the status quo or are at least reluctant to enter into territory requiring us to speak up or speak out as we realize the human driven consequences of a climate crisis.

Our Psalm today gives ear to teaching, understanding, direction, and inclination. Do you and I honestly, earnestly, desire to learn and practice the way of the statues that honor the responsibility entrusted to us, as humans, to be faithful stewards of creation-not dominators, rather, serious caregivers to the

fragile, yet elastic web of life? The Genesis story doesn't begin with humankind...Are we able to focus our eyes on the life that exists when we turn from worldly visions? Do we honestly long for God's commandments and trust that our Creator's judgements are good? Perhaps from time-to-time we may try to skate around the possibilities or be selective as may be most convenient? A forthright firm plea to plant these desires and help them to flourish can give us hope and strength.

The commandment to love one another as expressed in the letter to the Romans today is summed up in the one command, "Love you neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor. I ask you to consider how one can say we love our neighbor and do no wrong while paying little attention to the catastrophe that is facing our neighbors, human and otherwise? Please don't mistake my zeal with this question. I am very grateful for the ERD response. What my heart and soul say is there is much more that is needed to address the cries of our neighbors, near-by and globally, being devastated by drought, flooding, hurricanes and wildfires. Further, this reading makes it clear that we are aware of the time. Putting on the armor of light, acknowledging and facing the challenges of the day, for me, carries with it the responsibility of acting as sentinel. Watching, being aware, and recognizing "dangers" and alerting others to be attuned to and act upon the changes that are necessary to enter into a deeper level to God's love for both people and planet remind us that we are a part of the flock. It is NOW, the moment; exhibiting a sense of the urgency; the calamities are happening in our daily midst. The "hawks" seeking prey and feeding on the helpless, marginalized, and voiceless. The greed and hunger of a few who want more, more, more takes a death toll on the many. Even for those of us who aren't consciously "hawkish" might we need to reflect on our habits and desires as they surely contribute to the destruction?

Believe it or not, like it or not, acknowledge it or not, we are reaching tipping points; as temperatures rise, we are seeing more wildfires, releasing vast amounts of carbon emissions. Science shows us that as the frozen permafrost begins to thaw, the methane begins to bubble up from melting organic waste below the ice. Information from Environmental Action, a group that has been around since 1970, says that every 45 seconds, a garbage truck's worth of plastic is being dumped into our oceans. Myriad reliable resources share and bear witness to how a relative "handful" of humans daily contribute to the destruction of the planet and its inhabitants; all those considered less-thans. If you're inclined, you may want to read a recent article in The Atlantic. It provides shocking evidence and breath taking scientific back-up that is a frightening reality for the whole earth, our Island home...

I spoke of confrontation earlier. Today's Gospel brings to light how it is becoming more and more crucial for each of us to stand up to and confront people, governments, financial institutions, extractive industries and organizations at whose selfish whims, our Creator's gift, meant for the joy, tranquility, and delight of all are being exploited and vanquished. While unpleasant and hard, it is justified confrontation and a necessity. Each of these entities benefits in some way from the status quo. I say this based on a portion of something that I researched while writing this homily: Some governments benefit by playing to a nationalist, anti-climate, anti-immigrant, anti-women base of support.

As faith communities, it is essential, that together, we unite and overcome these hurdles. Whatever backlash may be the outcome, we understand that it's wrong to destroy God's creation, and it is most certainly wrong to profit from such destruction. "Religious communities have a responsibility to society, and a sacred duty, to speak out in the face of wrong. Confrontation of evil is part of the prophetic tradition of the church. Now is such a time to raise prophetic voices."

In the words of the late great prophet Archbishop Tutu, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."

So you mortal, I have made a sentinel. Wake up! It is time! Kick off your flip flops, startle your neighbors, raise your voice, wave your arms. Gather in the name of Jesus, and following his example, ensure that peace and justice flow like a river...