

**SLD04.25.10 4<sup>th</sup> Easter Earth Day**  
**Luke 12:48b,c**  
**Emory Presbyterian Church**  
**Jill Oglesby Evans**

**“So Earth Had This Boyfriend....”**

“So Earth had this boyfriend...” begins humorist Emily Levine, the so-called “Delta Oracle” in a recent issue of *Sky Magazine*,<sup>1</sup> in her version of the relationship between Earth and Humankind, a relationship that from Levine’s point of view is best understood as a romantic comedy. You know, “girl meets boy, girl loses boy, girl gets back at boy.”

“In Levine’s romantic comedy, Earth is the girl – you know, ‘Mother Earth’ - and Humankind is the guy, hereafter known as *Mankind*.

So first, girl meets boy:

“Fade in on Earth orbiting the sun, spewing volcanic ash, oozing primordial slime. At this point she’s around 13.5 billion years old (for evolutionists), 3000 years old (for creationists) or 21 years old (for dogs.) The point is, she’s a woman in her prime. [Note ‘prime’ – ‘primordial.’]

“In the meet-up scene, Man falls out of a tree right on top of Earth. Of course, Earth doesn’t recognize Man as Prince Charming; she thinks he’s a complete Neanderthal. But over time he evolves into *Homo Sapiens*, smart man. Smart enough to worship Earth. Literally. He showers her with gifts like in *Pretty Woman* where Richard Gere buys Julia Roberts a diamond necklace, except Man’s idea of a present is a sheep with a freshly slit throat. Still, it’s the thought that counts.

“Cut to the second thing every romantic comedy needs – the montage: Earth and Man riding a carousel, gazing into a fire, taking long walks on the beach – oh wait,

---

<sup>1</sup> April 2010, p.152.

Earth *is* the beach. The point is, Earth returns Man's love. She showers *him* with gifts: her mineral deposits, oil deposits, rich topsoil...all without a pre-nup. That's how green Earth is.

Flash forward 50,000 years. Man has evolved from Homo Sapiens (man who knows things) to Homo Fabricans (man who makes things) to Homo Economicus (man who exploits things.) As CEO of Planet Earth, Man now demands ever-higher levels of productivity, ever-higher yields. Maybe this part of the movie should be called "Girl Does All the Work in the Relationship."

Plus, Man's becoming very controlling. He monitors Earth's behavior, points out every (San Andreas) fault, makes mountains out of molehills. Well, actually, he makes molehills out of mountains, what with pit-mining and everything. Bottom line, Earth is in an abusive relationship.

Worse for her, she's menopausal. That's what global warming really is: hot flashes. But does Man care? No. In fact, since his first clumsy telescope, Man has been looking to see what else is out there. Maybe another planet, a younger one. It's the old story: Man wants his space.

"So where do we go from here?"

"In Act Three of Levine's romantic comedy, Man *does* leave Earth. At first she is desolate. You can tell because she eats Rocky Road ice cream straight from the container. But what do you know but that out from under Man's thumb, Earth begins to flourish. Once arid regions become green. Rain forests reemerge. All the animals Man had wiped off her face come back. Earth's like Brad Pitt in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* – she regains her youth. Even more importantly, she regains *herself*.

As it turns out, the third act of Levine's movie isn't "Girl Gets Boy" or even "Girl Gets Back at Boy," but "Earth Gets her Mojo Back." "Mojo" in this context meaning her personal magnetism, her magical power, her "groove," if you will. Her "zone." Her Self.

It's not an ending that makes everyone happy. Executives don't like it. ("You call this a romantic comedy?") But it does make Earth happy. "And isn't that," Levine asks, "what we *should* be thinking about on Earth Day?" What makes *Earth* happy?

She has a point. Just like Mother's Day or Father's Day, Earth Day should be all about what makes *Earth* happy. And maybe it's true that, like many women in their prime facing "empty nest," the only way for Earth truly to flourish again on her own terms *is* to launch out of her life those whom she's fed, watered and grown for so long.

But wait. *Is* the only way for Earth to get back her mojo for us to leave her altogether?

Call me selfish...call me Oedipal....call me Peter Pan... but I don't want to go. I don't want to be launched. I don't want to grow up and move away, never mind be jettisoned from, my home planet. Isn't there any way we could stick around and make her happy? Any way we maybe work things out, make peace, live in harmony, if we remained together in the same household? What would have to change? After all these years of an abusive relationship, is it even possible?

Back in 1970, U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson and Harvard graduate student Denis Hayes thought so it might be. Thought it was worth a try, anyway. So they launched an "environmental teach-in" (how 70's does that sound ~~se~~?) to raise awareness about the ecological issues confronting our planet.<sup>2</sup> Some 20 million people participated across the United States, and "Earth Day" was born. Politicians took notice and the event led

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 60.

to unprecedented clean air, water and wildlife legislation and to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency.

“By 1990, 200 million people in 141 countries celebrated Earth Day by acting locally on global environmental issues. This month, as Earth Day celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, its networks connect more than 17,000 organizations in 174 countries. Earth Day 40’s goal: “A billion acts of green” around the world.”

“The faith community was somewhat slow to come to the engagement of environmental issues”<sup>3</sup> but in 1991, 32 Nobel laureate and other eminent scientists circulated an “Open Letter to the American Religious Community” that expressed deep doubts about the adequacy of humanity’s response to the planet’s environmental problems. “We scientists...” read the letter, “urgently appeal to the world religious community to commit to preserve the environment of the Earth.” Two years later the National Religious Partnership for the Environment was formed.

Subsequent continuing and wide-spread focus on both the theology and the praxis of the care of creation spawned environmentally-active groups in virtually every denomination and faith, including our own Presbytery’s Earth Covenant Ministry, founded and led by the young Reverend Alan Jenkins, the first pastor in our denomination to be ordained specifically to environmental education and activism. We at Emory Church, I’m proud to say, were the first church to sign up as founding members of Earth Covenant Ministry.

In 1998 began the Interfaith Power and Light campaign designed to mobilize a religious response to global warming. The Interfaith Power and Light organization

---

<sup>3</sup> “Nature Gets Religion,” Gretel H. Schueller, Monday, Sept. 03, 2001, remark by Paul Gorman, executive director of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment.. <http://www.plattsburgh.edu/academics/journalism/faculty/schueller.php>

established programs in every state, including Georgia, for the purpose of educating congregations and facilitating tangible ways for communities to put their faith into action.<sup>4</sup> GIPL is the acronym for Georgia's chapter of Interfaith Power and Light, and we at this church recently signed up for one of GIPL's thorough and engineer-led Energy Audits, which should take place in the next month or so. With the information from that audit, not only will we address whatever recommendations are within our means, we will also apply for a...are you ready for this?...a \$25,000 matching grant from GIPL.. The stated purpose of GIPL's grant program is "to make improvements that will lower a church's dependence on polluting forms of energy and institute changes that would otherwise be cost-prohibitive."<sup>5</sup> What does that put you in the mind of? How about replacing our sanctuary heating and air conditioning system? That's what our Session concluded, anyway.

As it turns out, the estimate we've gotten for replacing our inefficient heating and air system is about \$55,000. Of course, this being a matching grant and all, we've got to come up with the other \$25,000, which'll make anybody gulp. However, we've already begun consolidating a little money, and hopefully any of you weary of lap robes in the winter and hand fans in the summer will consider this a heads-up: a way may be opening to achieve a better, more comfortable, more energy-conscious space for worship.

You might wonder whether we spend so much money making our own worship space more comfortable and eco-friendly. It's a question worth pondering. However, don't imagine that this investment only for ourselves. Not only will it benefit future generations of worshippers at this church, it will also benefit Mother Earth herself.

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://interfaithpowerandlight.org/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.gipl.org/grant.html>

Remarked one theologian “The mission of caring for God’s creation is the heart of religious life itself.” For we who worship God cultivate a sense of reverence for creation and resonate with a sense of responsibility for the world we are blessed to inhabit. The science of ecology *needs* us and our sense of the sacred.

“If the world (were) just a bowl of molecules banging against each other,” asks Hossein Nasr, a professor of physics and religion at Georgetown University of an audience gathered at Yale, “...where is the sacredness of nature?” Remarks Gary Paul Nabhan, ecologist at the Sonoran Desert Museum in Arizona, “if scientists stick to reason alone, then our work has no meaning. It needs to be placed in some spiritual context.”

And I say that the spiritual context in which we must place the work of environmentalism is a sacred regard for creation as gift, as blessing, as grace, and as a profoundly complex and cohesive system of which humanity is only a part. A system that includes us, but also includes the whole spectrum created matter. The context in which environmental concerns need to be placed is a theology of the *kinship*, of the connectedness, the mutually dependent relatedness, of all creation.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, Christian liturgies have long included references to the company of creation in praising God. Expressions like “joining in the hymn of all creation,” and “let heaven and nature sing,” and “let all creation join in one, to praise God’s holy name,” remind us of a kind of unitive background music of a creation-praising world. But now communities of faith are invited to “open our church windows” a little wider in order to

---

6

[www.seasonofcreation.com/theology/kinship/A%20Theology%20of%20Kinship%20with%20Creation.pdf](http://www.seasonofcreation.com/theology/kinship/A%20Theology%20of%20Kinship%20with%20Creation.pdf)

broaden our consciousness of creation not only as co-worshippers but as active partners in the redeeming of God's beloved community .

To "go there," however, we have to move beyond considering Earth as an "it," a non-personal, material resource existing solely for human benefit, to an intricate living system in which we must learn to live lightly and lovingly, respectfully and responsively. For while "the theory of evolution emphasizes that humans do have a biological connection with other creatures, from that same perspective, non-humans are usually viewed as inferior, lower in the hierarchy of beings. ...The suggestion that we should celebrate in some personal way with this 'it' called Earth used to be thought of as nothing short of paganism.

"This dualistic perspective is deeply engrained in both Western thought and Western Christianity. But with the development of creation theology, the resurfacing of Celtic spirituality, the increasing appreciation for the testimonies of indigenous sacramental life, and, of course, the burgeoning urgency of all manner of environmental concerns, Christian seekers are looking deeper into biblical traditions for wisdom relating the deep bonds between humans and the rest of the natural world. If in our religious imaginations and practice, we are able to include in our kinship the whole of creation, then surely we will take more seriously the obligations, duties, joys and mutuality of any healthy life-giving relationship."<sup>7</sup>

"From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required," Jesus reminds his disciples. And Earth has showered us humans with a seemingly endless supply of place and resource and beauty, has she not? "From one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded." Lk 12:48 b,c

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

This is the challenge to humankind, and unless we can rise to it, maybe Emily Levine is right. Maybe the only way for Earth to get back her mojo is to get shot of *us*. Despite our adolescent presumption of unconditional, unreserved and infinite love, sooner or later every mom, every lover, every giver, besides God, is bound to wear out. And we've acted for so long as if Earth won't, as if Earth'll go on forever, as if Earth'll put up with anything, maybe we can't change. Or can't change fast enough.

But Earth's greatest advocate, 76-year-old globetrotting eco-warrior Jane Goodall, does not hold that view. Goodall's perennial message is one of optimism and hope. "If everybody could think a little bit about the small choices they make every day," she says: "What do you eat, (where does it come from? How did it get to you? Does it result in animal cruelty?) What do you wear, how was it made, does it damage the environment? When people start thinking like that, they *do* change. They do *make* changes. And when more and more people think like that," says Goodall, "we get a critical mass,"<sup>8</sup>

Will it be enough of a critical mass? And soon enough to restore Earth's mojo?

Who, really, can say. But Jesus always seems to think his disciples can do whatever he asked of them. And he's always willing to help them try.

To the glory of God. Amen.

---

<sup>8</sup> Delta Sky Magazine, p. 62.