

SLD05.09.10 6th Easter Celebrating Creation Mother's Day
Emory Presbyterian Church
Psalm 34: 1-5, 8
Jill Oglesby Evans

“Umm...umm...good!”

We come today to the fifth in our six-week series of celebrating Creation, today with a focus on the land and the things that grow on it – trees and plants and flowers - all the flora that provides much of the air we breathe and the food we eat. Just as on Easter Sunday we celebrated the resurrection of Jesus Christ, throughout this Easter season we're celebrating Christ's presence in all Creation, as well as inviting Creation to celebrate with us.

This is a little different approach for us. I mean, we're used to celebrating Creation on Earth Day, but six whole weeks of it?! We Presbyterians are not all *that* fond of celebrating during worship, period, never mind for six weeks straight! Generally speaking, we prefer to be more...shall we say...respectful...more contained...more somber, in our worship.

Take communion, for example. I grew up thinking communion was fairly funereal, didn't you? You know, tipping a cup to dead Jesus and remembering what a great guy he was, and how much he suffered, and what all he did for us? And surely all that *is* important to “doing this is remembrance of him.” And especially when you and I are in suffering mode ourselves, who *doesn't* appreciate the sacrifice and company of our long-suffering Savior?

But that's not the only way to celebrate communion. Maybe not even the best way. In recent decades, the emphasis has on celebrating communion has been more on the *celebration* aspect of it. The “Hurray, Christ is risen!” part more than the “mm, mm, mm, wasn't it a shame he had to die for us” dimension. I mean, communion is still

and will always remain a remembrance, to be sure, of the whole of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. But the practice of communion in worship can be more a celebration of the mystery of unexpected new life and of the sweetness of keeping company with the risen Beloved than "alas, my Savior died."

So today, since we're already in celebration mode, this time of land and its harvest, *and* of mothers, *and* of the sweetness of Jesus' communion with us, I thought we might combine these three hopeful emphases and have a mom, Rose Watkins, borrow something from the land – wheat and butter and sugar – to make something sweet and festive and homemade for us to celebrate communion with. So, you know, we could "taste and see that the Lord is good," that the land is good, and for alliteration's sake, I want to say that the "lard" is good, but let's not go there. Rather I'll say that the loving alchemy of the kitchen is good.

So today, thanks to the land and Jesus and Rose Watkins, we're going to "taste and see that the Lord is good." Umm...umm... good. Lovingly made, homemade shortbread good. Today we're going to taste the sweetness of Jesus' presence through homemade shortbread with sprinkles on top.

Scandalous, huh?

And Jesus took the shortbread and broke it and...popped it into his mouth and said, "umm, umm, good!" You know he would've if he'd had Rose's shortbread instead of that stale ole' matzoh.

Anyhow, that's what *we're* going to do today, in remembrance and celebration of the risen Christ. And there's theological warrant for it, too. Notes preacher Craig Barnes, "the biblical interpretation of life begins with the affirmation that we were

created hungry, *and*.¹ *The whole world is our food*. Which, of course, includes homemade shortbread.

American poet William Carlos Williams affirms, “There is nothing to eat, seek it where you will, but the body of the Lord.” Today we seek the body of the Lord in festive homemade shortbread, given to us by the land, the Lord and a laudable mom.

There’s yet another reason we’re celebrating communion today with homemade shortbread – it’s one of the ways we’re inviting Creation to come worship with us. You may have noticed during these weeks of celebrating Creation that we’ve played around with different ways of inviting Creation to come on in and worship with us: Keeping the windows open to let in the air. Passing out seashells to include the sea. Or lavender to remember the garden of the earth, or today, rosemary to celebrate the gifts of the land.

The reason why we’re doing that is intentionally to invite Creation into the sanctuary to worship with us. You see, usually Creation is sort of out there, and we wave periodically and say “gee, you’re pretty,” or “I’d like to eat you,” or “can I pet you” or “hike through you” or “exploit you?”

But what if we paused for a moment to consider all the members and elements of creation as also having a relationship with their Creator. Did God not create us all? Remember first John: ...”in the beginning was the Word...and all things came into being through the Word, and without the Word not one thing came into being?” (John 1:1-3) What if Creation were a living place made up of sky, clouds, rivers, trees, the wind, the sand, into which the Spirit placed our spirits? The aboriginal Rainbow Spirit Elders of Australia echo the wisdom of indigenous peoples everywhere when they teach

¹ M. Craig Barnes, *The Pastor as Minor Poet*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich., 2009. p.32.

that “Creation is something...yet it is not a thing – it is a living entity.”² And further, that this living entity called Creation is moved by the same spiritual impulse as we humans to praise and celebrate their Creator. Isn’t scripture full of dancing mountains and clapping trees and roaring seas who are forever celebrating their Creator with grand exuberance? So during this season of celebration, we’re doing our best not only to honor and acknowledge Creation but also to joint with it, and to ask it to join with us. so we might all praise God’s name together!

Granted that’s a lot weight to place on a piece of homemade shortbread and a sprig of rosemary, but you get the idea. What we’re trying to do during this season of celebrating creation is to invite it in to celebrate with us, today, specifically, the land and all that grows on it, all that comes from it.

In fact, according to scripture, we come from it. Remember what Bill Brown taught us during our Faith and the Environmental series last year, how there are two different creation stories in Genesis? The first one, with its higher view of humanity, presents us as made in the image of God, with the responsibility to relate to (name) and care for the rest of creation. The second story, though, presents humanity as formed of dirt, of soil, made in the image less of God than of the earth itself, with the message that we are kin to, related to, brothers and sisters of, creation.

The name God gave Adam, the first human, was originally Adamah, Hebrew for dirt. Psalm 104, Bill told us, uses a word for humanity that is best translated as “earthling,” that is, “of the earth.” Even the word human come from “humus,” Latin for soil.

²Rainbow Spirit Elders quoted in Invitation to Worship: A Theology of Kinship with Creation. Chapter Two.

So today we celebrate the gift of the land as part of the family, our family, for the source of life it was for us, and the source of life it *is* to us. Today we celebrate the soil both for our origin and for our sustenance, for our roots and our future, for holding, nourishing and feeding us all, for receiving our waste and forgiving our wastefulness, and, through cycles of rest and decomposition, also for regenerating itself as best as it is able.

Since our use of the land is often the source of its distress, we also celebrate today the measures people take to care for the land such as recycling, growing or buying organic foods, avoiding toxic chemicals, and the people themselves who make choices to compost, use cloth bags, install rain barrels, grow some of their own food.

And the cooks. Oh my! Let's not forget today to celebrate the cooks who take the harvest of the land and make it palatable and delicious. So altered are our lifestyles from only a few decades ago, there aren't as many good cooks around as there once was. I'm not talking *great* cooks, I'm talking about *good* cooks, the people, used to be mostly women, mostly moms, who cooked every day to keep their families fed and healthy. Today we celebrate women and men alike who take the trouble to skip processed food, buy seasonally, go for fresh ingredients and add skill and love and a sense of adventure to make something pricelessly nourishing of it.

Since today is Mother's Day, I'd like us especially to tip our hats to all the mothers, past, present and future, who cooked for their families. What do you think of when you hear the phrase "a home cooked meal?" What's the favorite thing your mom cooked, or cooks? Did you ever get to choose a special meal for your birthday? Anything you wanted? What did you ask for?

Nowadays a lot of people think of which restaurant they'd most like to go to. But used to be, and for some of us still is, we'd ask our mom to fix our favorite thing. And often, she would.

Do you know, if more moms and dads, never mind child-free adults, had the time and energy today to cook nutritious, yummy food at home, how many of the problems associated with our petroleum-addicted food system would go away? Like the economic and public health issues associated with agribusiness, commodities subsidization, and packaging, marketing and transporting "cheap processed food?"

Praise God for cooks!

And praise God for farmers, real farmers who work the land and get dirt under their nails and market their own produce and think about more than profit when they make their decisions about what and how to plant. Praise God for the increase in organic farmers and local farmers and people willing to pay a premium for food that's as good for the earth as it is for them. Because there's no question about it; in the long run, "cheap food" is deceptively costly to both our and the earth's health.

So thank you, God, for the countless little everyday choices people make these days that positively impact how we relate to and benefit from the Creation.

And the movements, oh my, the movements around growing and eating food – the Organic Food movement, the Ethical Eating movement, the Slow Food Movement, the Buy Locally Movement, the Mindful Eating movement, the Food and Justice Coalition, the Pesticide Action Network...shoot, you'd think growing a tomato in your backyard were something new! Who knew it could be so political, never mind popular. Why, one of these days we might even have a community garden in our front yard here at the church!

How much we have to celebrate, appreciate, be thankful for, on this Sunday of worshipping with the land and the life it sustains. And the best way to do it, so far as I can see, is to gather around “our true mother, Jesus,” as Julian of Norwich called him. To gather around “our true mother, Jesus, who,” as Julian says, “...carries us within him in love...and feeds us with himself...in the blessed sacraments, which is the precious food of true life.” Friends, let’s sing a hymn and say what we believe, and then gather around Jesus’ table to taste and see that the Lord is good – umm...umm...good. To the glory of God. Amen.