

Trinity 7, 2019
Stewards Unto Righteousness
Romans 6:19-23
St. Andrew's Church, Jacksonville, OR
By Fr. Bill Baker

"For the beauty of the earth, for the beauty of the skies, for the love which from our birth over and around us lies. For the beauty of each hour, of the day and of the night, hill and vale, and tree and flower, sun and moon, and stars of light..."(1940 hymnal #296).

The glory of this hymn echoed in my mind off the spires of rock that encompassed my journey as I traversed the paths that led me upward to the summit of Mt. Whitney, a truly glorious day for me. "The earth, in all its beauty, declares the glory of God" were the words that kept running through my mind. There were times I could only stand and stare unable to convince myself that any of this was real. It was beautiful...the earth does declare the glory of God!

A few months ago we came together for the service of Ash Wednesday were we declared that "from dust we came and unto dust we shall return." Since that day there has been something connecting my commitment to Christ at that Ash Wednesday service and my desire to ascend the highest point in the lower 48. You see the earth does declare the glory of God and we are of the earth! We were taken directly from the beauty of His creation and the very breathe of God was breathed into us and we were made into the image of the Triune God! The pristine landscapes and lakes that few feet have trod verse the adulterated forests and streams occupied by greed and lack of concern. Oh, the beauty of the earth...until sin soils the very foundations of life.

There is a foundational connection between humanity and the earth. The two biggest conversations that pervade our consciousness revolve around how to care for our environment and how to care for our fellow human being. So Paul's words today should bare our souls to the truth of our condition relative to the redemptive power of Christ's resurrection where all creation will be made anew for the eternal future. *"I speak, says Paul, after the manner of men because of the*

infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. For when ye were servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness." You see, until the grace and mercy of God came to fruition in Christ Jesus, until true forgiveness was accomplished on the cross, we were slaves to sin and ignorant of our disobedience, we felt no obligation to uprightness. We could abuse our earthly home and each other unaware of our sinful natures. But Jesus Christ rose with His mortal body and ascended into the heavens, witnessed by thousands! The creation is reclaimed! The dust is reclaimed! We are reclaimed! In Genesis God commanded us to "*...be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and to subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth*" (Gen. 1:28). If we can change our habits to bring health back to the very creation in which we were drawn from, then we can certainly change the habits of our nature to reflect the holiness of God!

Isn't introspection and change exactly what we are called to do during Lent? Isn't our connection to the earth what we are to recall on Ash Wednesday? Sin is what leads us to take advantage of our garden home and sin is what impels us to degrade and diminish human existence.

"But now, Paul tells us, being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." Paul is exhorting us to understand a basic Christian principle that even most Christians fail to grasp: Christianity is not just about what we believe, but also how we behave. First, **leave no trace behind**. Repent of your sinful ways and walk in holiness. Be an open book that does not comprise secrets. Live lives void of sinful evidence. Second **leave only footprints**. Be an honest witness showing the true path. Carry others when they have lost their way. Don't strive for more than what the will of God has prepared for you. And lastly, **lay you burdens down**. On the trail of life we carry many burdens we consider necessary. Don't forget to take the time to lay those burdens at the foot of the cross and spend time with the Master letting the pristine waters wash the soiled nature of your hearts.

Jesus says, *“If you love me, keep my commandments...If you love me, feed my sheep...If you love me you will obey me.”* To be part of the body of Christ there is an expectation to carry out the will of God and to put our faith into action. It is not enough to simply believe. The mere act of believing calls us to action. We should be excited to love God and to love one another, to be there when needed, to pick up after ourselves, to recycle and keep our waters clean, to manage our lands without the pursuit of corruptive greed.

“And I saw a new Heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea...And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful” (Rev. 21:1,5).

A new Heaven and a new earth...we are being prepared for holiness that we may occupy a new heaven and a new earth as a righteous people in a holy land. We must continue to reach for the glories of heaven, to be heaven bound each and every day. We must put away that which limits our sanctification and devote ourselves to His creation and to each other. In an obedience of love we will express the love of God to a world that still seeks.

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Do not give in to the inclinations of a world absorbed in the macerations of the current social climate, but rest in the inclinations of your hearts that the love of God is the foundation upon which all life and eternal existence rely. May the love of God persist in your hearts, lift your spirits to heavenly heights and bring you to everlasting peace.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.