

Learning About “Walking Humbly”

Affirmation of Values

We will protect our environment and support preservation programs that are based on scientific data designed to improve our resources, enhance biodiversity, and reverse human-caused climate change. (2017)

First Readings

Listen here, mortal:

*God has already made abundantly clear what “good” is, and what Yhwh needs from you: ...
walk humbly with your God.*

Micah 6:8

*O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?*

*You have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.
You have given them dominion [made us responsible] over the works of your hands, you have put all things under their feet, – all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

Psalms 8: 1, 3, 6-8

Second Reading:

from the American Baptist Policy Statement on Ecology: An Ecological Situational Analysis, 1989, 2007)

Our responsibility as stewards is one of the most basic relationships we have with God. It implies a great degree of caring for God’s creation and ALL God’s creatures. There can be no justice without right relationships of creatures with one another and with all of creation.

The study of ecology has become a religious, social and political concern because every area of life is affected by careless use of our environment. Creation is in crisis. We believe that ecology and justice, stewardship of creation and redemption are interdependent. All God’s people must be guided by the balance of reverence, the acknowledgement of our interdependence, the integrity of divine wholeness and the need for empowerment by the Holy Spirit to image God by our dominion/care [in relationship to creation]. (Mark 10: 43-45).

We continue this week with our “Living Our Values” series. This week we’re reflecting on the value statement with regards to the environment and our relationship to creation.

Hear the voice of Psalm 8 from the Inclusive translation:

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

When [we] look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of us, mortals that you care for us?

You have made [us] a little lower than [Yourself], and crowned [us] with glory and honor.

You have given [us] dominion [made us responsible] over the works of your hands, you have put all things under [our] feet, – all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

Psalm 8: 1, 3, 6-8

“You have made us responsible.”

Now, these familiar words from the prophet, Micah who says,

God has already made abundantly clear what “good” is [what Good looks like], and what Yhwh needs from you and me: ...

*Do justice, love mercy, and **walk humbly** with your God.*

(I want to give a special nod to Jeanne Dorn for inspiring this connection to the Micah text this morning.)

What does ‘walking humbly with God,’ and all creation look like? We might try first, what it likely does not look like for comparison.

For many who trust in the value of science, those who are engaged in environmental and social justice activism, the actions and words of some of our elected officials this year has been, enraging, discouraging, unconscionable. We’re witnessing evidence of what walking humbly in relationship with the earth DOES NOT look like. Recommendations to move forward with fossil fuel drilling projects and new natural gas infrastructure, promoting ‘clean coal,’ threatening the withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, threat of recommended roll backs of all manner of environmental protections, the persistent disregard for the wisdom of our indigenous sisters and brothers, the denial of human-caused climate change. We are inundated with these headlines seemingly daily. This is not what walking humbly looks like.

The negative impacts of the global warming process are accumulating. It is not right that the most vulnerable of human beings who are the least responsible for creating the mess we’re in are the most severely impacted. There’s no way to ‘pretty,’ this news up, yet it needs to be laid out here.

This is where we are and knowing this soberly rather than being isolated or immobilized with guilt, overwhelm, rage, denial, will allow *all* of us the possibility to engage *together* in the service of making a *just* transition happen. We have to look at the intersection of Climate and Social Justice. We as the primary culprits of global warming have messed things up on so many levels, and we have to be willing to learn from others who we have been discounted or not deemed worthy of our regard. Wisdom and sustainable solutions related to climate justice are coming from the edges, not the center. There will be no *just* transition for all unless we're willing to follow the unfamiliar voices.

“Walk humbly with God and all creation.”

This movement to a just transition is already underway, including the transition to renewable sources of energy like solar and wind. While complacency has dogged us for decades, and the voices in the wilderness have been crying out their warnings, the good news is THIS movement IS already afoot and people of color and first nations peoples are leading the way. Wisdom's voice is crying out to us to walk humbly with them, to follow their lead.

The good news doesn't stop there. American Baptists and members of this community have been laying tracks for decades, raising our shared consciousness about global warming and the intersection of social justice. Thanks be to God! We are not starting from scratch this morning.

I haven't time or room to recount *all* the evidence of this walking humbly path in this community this morning, but I can name a few things from the past:

- There's the **Earth Charter artwork** that hangs in our foyer signed by many of you in 2001, shortly after the charter was formalized. This is a symbol of a collective commitment to the tenets of the charter to practice living in a sustainable relationship with the planet.
- There are written accounts of the work of the 2005 Eco-Spirituality Group spearheading education programs on the Care of Creation for adults and children as well as initiating the collaboration with Earth Ministries to become a Greening Congregations Partner
- There was, “A Song for Our Planet,” the interfaith concert for environmental justice performed in 2012 by our choir and friends here
- I even discovered a sermon written and delivered here by Rod Romney, July 1989, entitled, “A People Meant to be Green.” The sermon was a part of series he called, “The Great Biography,” Series, and the sermon featured, the 12th century nun, abyss, Hildegard of Bingen.

And this parade of evidence does not begin to count for ALL the less visible, quiet, steady accumulative committed actions taken by many of you who have been engaged in environmental and social justice activism for decades, practicing conservation in your home and work lives, showing up and demonstrating, tracking the activity of our legislators, and even now, participating in the Interfaith Climate Action Group of First Hill.

“Walking humbly with God. Walking humbly on the earth.”

Some of you may be thinking, “I didn’t realize all this had happened here.” Where was I? The good news is, if you feel ‘late’ or delayed on your arrival to this moment, just know, it’s not too late for you. The earth and all her creatures need you though the day is getting darker, it’s not too late for you. You actually may be arriving to this hour RIGHT on time, ready NOW in a way that you weren’t before, to be awake to the call to walk, to dance, to march, to swim, to stand,...humbly with God and all creation on earth. It’s not too late. Walking humbly with God and creation has a spirited, engaged gait. It’s not passive or effacing, but rather appropriately wakeful, curious, honoring of the living spirit of all beings.

As I was researching about American Baptist’s involvement in the environmental movement over time, I discovered a document, originally drafted in 1979, called the “American Baptist Policy Statement on Ecology.” Like a nerd, I found it incredibly fascinating, and it rings true and consonant with what the Psalmist and the prophet Micah are speaking to in looking at ‘right’ relationship.

Our responsibility as stewards is one of the most basic relationships we have with God. It implies a great degree of caring for God’s creation and ALL God’s creatures. There can be no justice without right relationships of creatures with one another and with all of creation.

Creation is in crisis. We believe that ecology and justice, stewardship of creation and redemption are interdependent. All God’s people must be guided by the balance of reverence, the acknowledgement of our interdependence, the integrity of divine wholeness and the need for empowerment by the Holy Spirit to image God by our dominion/care [in relationship to creation]. (Mark 10: 43-45).

It is a communal journey we must make together toward a just transition, but it elementally begins right here with us, with you, with your heart.

Most mornings, I walk out of my house into the out of doors. The side walk takes me through my neighborhood, across a main arterial road and into one of our city’s public parks. It’s more than a habit for me. It’s a practice...a *spiritual* practice. I often walk alone, this allowing me a first glance of the day of how my body is feeling, and what’s up front in my mind and heart of concerns and preoccupations. As I begin to notice this body and heart data arising within me, there’s often an intentional moment where I speak to myself and say, “THIS, will be one of the most important things you do today. Be here now.”

My walks vary in their length of time and distance covered. I find more often than not, as I practice this walking, I naturally fall into a pace, rhythm that allows me to connect more fully with the surroundings and the various beings that are already present as I walk through this out-of-door field. This walking pace often allows for heart-full, gentle morning greetings toward people I pass. It allows for the names of the alder trees and the Bald Cypress and Poplar to come to mind. It allows me to notice that those ‘walking on water’ Coots have

returned. It allows me to receive the sung calls of the flying ones, the chickadees, crows, juncos and jays.

Three years ago, I found myself with an emerging hunger and longing within to deepen my connection with the natural world. Initially, I didn't really know what to do about it, except to just start going outside more. But the aching, longing for something persisted. It was as though I was trying to recover some part of myself that had been missing, some part of my soul.

The desire to walk out the door in the morning, has become a spiritual practice for me, one that hangs loosely on three tenets.

Know where you are!

Know who's with you!

Be where you are!

I hear the psalmist's voice again, "You have put all things under [my] feet, all sheep and oxen, the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, whatever passes along the paths of the sea." *Know where you are! Know who is with you!*

Spiritual practices are actions that we can engage in to avail ourselves to the Spirit, to the influence of mystery, even to revelation. It seems that walking humbly is THE walk. It's the practice of consenting to be in relationship with the One who Loves you, the ONE who will not let you go, AND to be in relationship with ALL creation.

God has made us responsible for creation. Practice attunes our mind and heart. It refines our response-ability.

I wish we could talk of these things together. I would love to know what your experience is, how it is you're finding your way in relationship with creation, and making the needed adjustments required as we face our future together.

I think I'm discovering that it all goes together. I can't walk humbly with God anymore without also walking in care of my own inner environment, walking in care of the earth and being willing to learn from all her beings, humbly. I just can't. Not anymore.

One of the more discrete but defining shifts that is happening to me in my own 'walking humbly on the earth' experiment, is a changed felt sense of relationship that is coming through practicing naming the beings around me, calling the trees and plants in my yard and in the park by their names, calling the birds by name, learning the backstory details about how the lake in that public park was formed. When we introduced ourselves earlier, we called aloud the names of bodies of water that we have some connection to, and what beauty to hear those names!

I realize I may be pushing up against your sensibility of boundaries about how things are. Do plants and trees and animals have feelings or capacity to be related to, you might wonder? Do I dare suggest that the creature beings, the plants and trees and bodies of water, have

something to teach you and me about living in right relationship in this world we share, just by our observing how they are in their natural states? Absolutely, yes.

Should you set out to practice in a new or different way, unexpected surprises and revelations may visit upon you. Taking on a walking practice with the earth and her creatures in mind and heart will likely reorient some of your internal wiring, your capacity to attune with the larger web of life. You may find yourself wanting to adjust your ways and how you move about and tread or dance across the ground. What used to be important, may become less so. It just happens. All of a sudden, your awareness about where your food comes from and when food is in season, will become important. You'll likely run up next to the realities of feeling trapped by old ways, the dwelling place that you live in and the limits there, that vehicle that you can't afford to sell...yet. You'll see the need to change your consumption patterns because you realize you're hurting vulnerable people by continuing.

'Walking humbly with God' on earth and all God's creation can be pretty darn radical. Incremental steps are the encouraged way to travel. It's the practice of short walks and small steps, that will nurture a new, integral seedling of curiosity about the wonders of creation, and it will take root in that corner of your heart field, and it will feed your soul, even through dark days.

May it be so with you.

Amen

Written by Rev. Harriet Platts

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