

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

THE WORSHIP OF GOD • JANUARY 27, 2019

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY

Litany

Heaven is declaring God's glory;
the sky is proclaiming God's handiwork.

**One day, God gushes the news; one night
informs another what needs to be known.**

They have no speech, no words – their voices can't be heard.

**Yet their sounds extend throughout the world,
their words reach to the ends of the earth.**

God has made a tent in heaven for the sun,
like a newly-wed coming from their suite.

**It rises in one end of the sky; its circuit is
complete at the other, nothing escapes its heat.**

The Lord's commands are pure, giving light to the eyes.

Honoring the Lord is all creation, lasting forever.

No doubt we are enlightened by God's commands!

The Scripture

1 Corinthians 12:12-25

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.

The Message
And the Earth Shall Rise
Nick Larson



Have you ever needed a whole new perspective on something? I know that often in my life. Right now, I feel that need for perspective, that can be so hard to get. The year 2018 was like that for us. A year that could be hard, at times, to get a perspective.

Just over 50 years ago, on Christmas Eve, human beings orbited the moon for the first time. The year was 1968, and it was awful from the start. I recently read an article in “Time Magazine,” where Jeffery Kluger recounted it like this: “Most years have at least a little something going for them, but 1968 was awful from the start. On just the 23rd day, North Korea seized the *USS Pueblo*, killing one sailor and holding the rest prisoner; on the 30th day, the start of the Vietnamese holiday of Tet, the Viet Cong launched a massive military offensive that cost more than 35,000 lives on both sides; on the 95th day, the Rev. Martin Luther King was murdered; on the 157th day, Senator Bobby Kennedy’s murder followed; on the 233rd day, Soviet army tanks crashed into Czechoslovakia; on the 241st day, the Democratic National Convention in Chicago descended into violence. The year was shaped – and soaked in – the blood that was shed.”

And then on the 359th day, there was beauty, a starlight. Just three days earlier, the crew of Apollo 8, Frank Borman, Jim Lovell, and Bill Anders had rocketed away from the mess at home and ventured out, becoming the first human beings to reach and orbit the moon.

They arrived, as history would have it, on Christmas Eve. During the eighth of their ten orbits, they pointed a television camera out one of their five windows and showed a global audience of one-billion people (nearly one of every three people alive then) the grainy, flickery but undeniable otherworldly sight of the ancient lunar surface crawling below the spacecraft. And in that moment, as the world watched, Bill Anders, began to read: “In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth,” and then he handed off to his crewmates, who took turns reading further verses from that ancient poetic text from Genesis – verses of renewal in a year of loss.

Half a century on, there are still lessons to be learned from that mission – lessons about the human spirit, about steady commitment, about how a shared undertaking larger than any individual can redeem, if not wholly heal, a fragmented nation. As with so much, part of what drove the decision to fly Apollo 8 was geopolitics, and there is much, too much for me to get into on a Sunday morning. But suffice it to say, that determination, grit, and ingenuity help Apollo 8 to even happen, despite the obvious risks and accelerated timelines.

Yet, this mission gave us an unexpected but most welcome gift. The celebrated photograph, that came to be known as *Earthrise*, which Anders captured as they came around the lunar far side of their third orbit. This photograph illustrated, and still does, as nothing else had, the fragility of our planet, and is widely credited with helping to kick-start the environmental movement.

In some ways, this space flight, did something unlike the first 361 days of that year, during a time of national coming apart with tearing and rending, it offered wholeness. “Thank you, Apollo 8. You saved 1968,” was a simple text of a telegram an unnamed American sent to the crew.

It gave us, literally, a new perspective.

From the factory floor to the three men in the spacecraft, an estimated 400,000 people had a hand in making the lunar mission possible. The lunar program spanned four presidencies and eight Congresses, and while there was squabbling over funding and schedules, there was bipartisan agreement that the larger mission would be seen through to the end.

Never before had human beings laid eyes on this beautiful blue marble of a planet before, at least not in its entirety. As poet Archibald MacLeish reflected, “For the first time in all of time, humanity has seen it not as continents or oceans from the little distance of a hundred miles or two or three, but seen it from the depth of space; seen it whole and round and beautiful...”

Today, we could use a little perspective like that. Think what you want, but 2018 was a lot like 1968, with racial tensions, geopolitics, and fear on the rise. Division, separation, and violence. And the bloodshed; yes, we still have the bloodshed, the deaths of too many innocent people who have died in the wake of fear and from the lack of ability to see human first.

Today, we could use a little perspective, for those of us who live beneath the stars on this little, blue marble together.

As Terry and I sat and discussed this series and what stars and movements we wanted to uplift, we discussed texts that would encompass this perspective. What do we as Christians have that offers us the sentiment captured in the unity of all of us being one humanity together on one planet?

Listen again to our text from this morning, but I've made a few minor adjustments, because the Apostle Paul, in his first letter to the church in Corinth, offers us new perspective as well.

“For just as the Earth is one and has many parts, and all the member of the Earth, though many are one Earth, so it is with Christ...Indeed, the Earth does not consist of one part, but many.

If the land would say, “Because I am not water, I do not belong to the earth,” that would not make it any less a part of the earth. If the whole body were clouds, where would the continents be? If the whole body were mountains, where would the sense of scale be? But as it is, God arranged the features in the Earth, each one of them, as God chose. As it is, there are many parts, yet one Earth. If one part suffers, all suffer together with it, if one feature is honored, all rejoice together with it.”

Friends, we are indeed the body of Christ, individually and collectively. We are members of the human body. Each diverse individual among us is gifted and made stronger by one's inclusion in the whole, and the whole is not complete without the inclusion of the other. Nowhere have I learned this more than from some of our members, who receive support from our All God's Children program, where I have learned so much from them being a part of our community.

We need this perspective, this human perspective. As we live beneath the stars, we need to remember that borders do not separate us; our lack of empathy and understanding does. As we live beneath the stars, our despair and our vulnerability do not have to make us weaker, but in fact, help us to recognize that with God's grace we can be stronger.

Last week, Pastor Terry challenged us, she encouraged us, she so adeptly described the despair that is all around us. She spoke of the heartache contained in our collective past, this past year and beyond. And as I watched her sermon on YouTube from my hotel room, she reminded me that our challenges can also unite us.

Creation care is an issue that the church can and should be doing more to be a part of. This photograph taken by Bill Anders helped indirectly start the Environmental Protection Agency (the EPA), and it helped inspire the first Earth Day in 1970. This photograph, the image of the world from the perspective of the desolate lunar surface is an iconic reminder of our need to protect the Earth's fragile resources.

We can live out our faith by caring for creation and helping to protect those fragile resources. In those first verses that open our holy text, read in 1968 while circling the moon, invite us to be good stewards of God's creation. We can be empowered with ideas and resources to walk gently on the earth.

So many of our issues in this world are connected to the belief that there is unprecedented harm being done to God's creation and people. From injury and illness to displacement and destruction people across the globe are being harmed, particularly the most vulnerable among us.

Here beneath the stars from where I sit, I notice that we don't have a lot of one-ness in our culture right now. As I sat and listened to the Diversity Breakfast, one of the speakers, shared this T-shirt. This one that says "Human." on it. (Human, Period) I know Terry touched on its last week. We are all made up of the ingredients listed on the back, like oxygen and nitrogen, but most of all we are made up with things like empathy and compassion. It is the recognition of those human attributes that help us to achieve so much.

People of faith have been and are inspired to act on ecological issues for a multitude of reasons, from protecting the sanctity of God's creation, to peacemaking due to violence over resources, to poverty issues sowing conflict over scarce resources, to its preservation for future generations. Our shared responsibility as people of faith needs to aid in creation care for the journey ahead. We, as people of faith, need to see that we are indeed one body, one planet, and this is the one we have.

So, as the Apollo 8 mission and photograph helped us change our perspective so, too, can the care of our planet help us unite the body – a Christ-like body that needs all the parts to work together for the betterment of the whole.

For starters, our High School Youth, spearhead by Taby's passion, have taken on the task of learning and pursuing this together. Our 2019 summer youth mission trip, at the end of July, will be focused around ecological justice issues in California, working with a Disciples of Christ congregation there that spearheads a program called Blue Theology, providing learning and serving experiences in ocean stewardship. In partnership with the world-famous Monterey Bay Aquarium and the Living Ocean Initiative, that congregation, located blocks from the beach, advocates for a healthy ocean. They explore creation care as an avenue that informs their theology of creation care.

Our middle schoolers, not to be left out, are going to be participating in some spring river and stream clean ups here in Missouri to help us be a part of taking care of our own holy waters.

Yet this isn't just something for our youth. Our congregation can do even more. We could explore becoming a Green Chalice Congregation, where we would take steps to put our commitment to creation care into action, by doing even more in our own congregation; from enhancing our recycling program, to making a commitment to use our real dishware more, to stop using Styrofoam, to changing to energy efficient light bulbs, to enhancing our heating and cooling systems, to continue to build on our amazing community garden by bringing some of those plants into our eating together, to using eco-friendly cleaning products, to host a farmers market, to have a green VBS theme, to partner with local organizations for advocacy, to do a creation care study series. To be a Green Chalice Congregation, we just need to make three of those changes and commit to making one additional change every three years.

In noticing *Earthrise*, and the new perspective it offers those of us living beneath the stars, I saw something with new eyes. I saw a photograph that helped shift the national attention. It showed us that while the Earth seems so big and indestructible from our perspective, it is so tiny and vulnerable when seen from space.

So here beneath the stars of Epiphany we sit, looking up for a guiding light above that will show us the way to where Jesus is already waiting. From our feet to the corners of the earth (that's what Terry challenged us with last week) to never forget that we, too, must walk, being the light of Christ in and among the shadows. So, let us carry the light of ecojustice, the light of creation care, the light of conservation of our rich resources.

I don't know about you, but 2019 is shaping up to be another hard year on the outside, and I, for one, am ready to recommit myself to a new larger perspective.

That poem by Archibald MacLeish that was on the cover of the "Times" along with this photograph taken from Apollo 8, says "And seeing it so, one question came to the minds of those who looked at it (the entirety of the earth). Is it inhabited? They said to each other and laughed – and then they did not laugh. What came to their minds a hundred thousand miles and more into space – half way to the moon as they put it – what came to their minds was the life on that little, lonely, floating planet; that tiny raft in the enormous, empty night."

To see the Earth as it truly is, small, and blue and beautiful in that eternal silence where it floats, is to see ourselves as riders on the Earth together, brothers and sisters, who know now they are truly human.

So, let us all embrace the human family, the notion that if one member on this tiny raft suffers, all suffer together with it. If one rider on the earth is honored, all rejoice together.

For we are the whole human body of Christ, each individually members of it. And I am ready to see the Earth rise, to rise up and join together, overcoming the pettiness of our bickering, the political posturing, the human violence we create, so that we might all see the Apostle Paul's "still more excellent way" inviting us to take an even larger perspective.

So, it is my prayer for all of us, that we, too, can find our place within the body of Christ, in 2019, so that as we live together beneath the stars, so that we might be inspired to see everything around us with this new, larger, perspective.

Thanks be to God. Amen.