

Sermon – Yr. B, Proper 17, Mark 7 1-8, 14-15

As some of you know, my husband and I love to travel, usually on a cruise ship. A few years ago, we had the privilege of taking a cruise to Greenland. We had flown over Greenland many times and I longed to see its beauty up close. However, the morning we were due to see this remote land for the first time, we woke up to the fog horn blaring outside. It seemed like I was going to have to wait another day or so before my dream was fulfilled. The captain told us there was a chance the fog might clear so that we could enter the beautiful fjord of Prince Christian Sound. If not, we would have to go around the southern end of Greenland to get to our first port. With great hope, I went out on the deck to get that first glimpse of land, when and if the fog cleared. As I was watching, all of a sudden out of nowhere, we sailed out of the fog into a perfect clear blue day. There, directly in front of me, was the glory of God's creation; a huge iceberg floating in front of majestic mountains, and the beautiful inlet to Prince Christian Sound. I was so overwhelmed with the magnificence of God's creation that I hugged my husband and cried. As we have traveled, I have continually been amazed by all that God has created. The abundant variety of birds, plants, fish, and animals is staggering. All of them have been given what they need to survive and protect themselves. The beauty of the

mountains, the vastness of the oceans, and the glory of a rainbow, all remind us of God's presence.

However, in our travels, we have also seen and heard of the damage being done to this planet. In Alaska, the village of Newtok is being moved because global warming is causing the permafrost to thaw, and ocean storms are causing coastal erosion that is threatening homes and the infrastructure of the village. There are 31 other villages suffering the same fate. The Great Barrier Reef in Australia is dying due to damage caused by global warming, pollution, and human activity. We learned about the Great Pacific Garbage Patch (or Vortex) in the Pacific Ocean, which is the largest accumulation of ocean plastic. It's believed to be twice the size of Texas. We, as a human race, seem to be slowly destroying what God has so perfectly made.

Starting today, September 1st, and going through to October 4th the Episcopal Church is joining fellow Christians in what is called a "Season of Creation." The Episcopal Church Creation Care website states that this is a "time for renewing, repairing, and restoring our relationship to God, one another, and all of creation. This year we are invited to consider anew our ecological, economic, and political ways of living." In other words, it is a time to consider what we as individuals, a church,

and members of humanity can do to better care for all that God has created.

It makes sense that Christians should celebrate this “Season of Creation”. The Bible tells us that God created the world and all that is in it and that He has put it in our hands to care for. Genesis 1:26 says; “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over cattle, and over all wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’” In Genesis 2:15, while talking about the land, God tells Adam and Eve “work it and take care of it.” The writer of Psalm 115 tells us that “The heavens are the Lord’s heavens, but the earth he has given to human beings.” Steven Mbogo, in a podcast on Creation Care pointed out that, “It should be in our nature as Christians to care for our environment.”

There is truth in that statement. Even today’s gospel reading can help us to understand why. At first glance, today’s gospel seems to be about religious traditions that hinder our walk with God. The Pharisees were upset because Jesus's disciples were ignoring the tradition of washing their hands before eating. In the midst of that rather heated discussion, Jesus made it perfectly clear that what matters to God is what we do, and that what we do comes from the heart. He said, “For

it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come.”
(Mark 7: 21) However, there is also the opposite, that from the human heart good intentions can come. As our love for God drives us to care for people in need, so our love for God should also drive us to care for all of his creation.

And so, the Episcopal Church invites us to take time this month to explore and consider what we might do to care, in a better way, for this planet. The Episcopal Church website has plenty of resources and ideas that can help us on this journey. There are other Creation Care websites as well. On one website I was looking at, there was a list of “7 Ways to Care for the Environment.” Unfortunately, when I was on that website, I failed to write down which website it was. However, I thought that it was interesting that the very first thing on the list was to go outside and take in the beauty of God’s creation that is all around us. The thought is that when we drink in the wonders of God’s handiwork our minds and our hearts will be opened to understand that caring for God’s creation is a reflection of our love for God.

What a good way to start this “Season of Creation.” On this beautiful Labor Day weekend, let us take time to go outside and really enjoy God’s handiwork. Enjoy the beauty of the sunrise and sunset. Notice the variety of birds, each with their own song. Take in the vastness of

all the mountains around us. Go for a walk in the woods or along the water. Enjoy a caterpillar or a spider making its web in your backyard. Enjoy the assorted plants all around you. As you do, remember that God has given us all of that and much, much more. As our hearts and minds are filled with the magnificence of God's creation may it stir up in us a desire to change what we can to be better stewards of this gift that God so graciously gave us to care for. Jesus made it perfectly clear, what we do matters to God. The question is what will we do in caring for His Creation?

In Jesus's name, Amen