

**THIS IS MY BODY**  
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Second Sunday of Easter  
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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We have forgotten who we are.  
We have sought only our own security  
We have exploited simply for our own ends  
We have distorted our knowledge  
We have abused our power.

We have forgotten who we are.  
Now the land is barren  
And the waters are poisoned  
And the air is polluted.

We have forgotten who we are.  
Now the forests are dying  
And the creatures are disappearing  
And the humans are despairing.

We have forgotten who we are.

[From the UN Environmental Sabbath Project.]

*Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell in unity!* (Psalm 133)

What if our “brothers and sisters” include all earth’s creatures? I mean, who isn’t part of Mother Earth’s family? *Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell in unity!*

Once upon a time and for a very long time, trees, rivers, animals, and mountains were considered sacred. And then something happened almost overnight in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Two centuries later Christianity would be blamed for the degradation of the whole earth.

For hundreds of thousands of years, long before there was organized religion, all people and every culture revered the natural world. Human beings figured out quite early that the world was not made by them or just for them. When humanity arose out of the animal world everything was already here and working together and had been for at least a billion years. But, then, who was counting?

When humanity arose out of the animal world everything was already here and working together. You didn’t have to be a rocket scientist or a Presbyterian to figure that out. You didn’t need the Bible. You just had to pay attention, which is, as it turns out, a form of prayer.

For hundreds of thousands of years people revered, feared and honored the Power that raised the sun every morning, filled the rivers with fish and the land with seeds. Humans felt deep respect and gratitude for the Mystery of Being.

No one knew exactly how it all came to be. And if the animals or plants knew, they weren't telling. And so, as the planets most imaginative and neurotic animal it fell to humans to fret about the riddle of existence.

*Why is there something instead of nothing? Who or what's behind it?*

Animism was one answer. Animals, plants and things were animated by spirits or personalities of one sort or another, or so it was thought.

*Why is there something instead of nothing? Who or what's behind it?*

Perhaps, countless spirits. Animism was and still is one answer.

Pantheism was and still is another answer. Whatever the Awesome Power was It Was Everything and Everything Was It And Nothing More. Pantheism. Everything is god.

Those are but two of many attempted answers to the riddle of existence. But no one answer satisfied human curiosity. People disagreed.

For hundreds of thousands of years, long before organized religion evolved people disagreed with each other and sometimes violently. You don't need a religion to start a war. (Although it might help to justify one!)

As human brains evolved so did our gods along with their stories until one day the possibility of One Supreme God totally distinct and separate from the world was discovered. Or was it *revealed* or possibly *invented*? Anyway, that God was like a lord over a kingdom similar to human kingdoms. Or, perhaps that God was like a potter or painter or poet. The world was like the work of an artist in love with her creation. And thus theism was born.

Theism denotes a personal God passionately in love with the world even though not of the world itself. Or, maybe of it a little. But if so, how or when?

*The earth is the Lord's and all that dwells therein*, said this Judeo-Christian theistic tradition in one of its Psalms. The ethical implication of that declaration is *stewardship* or the old English word for stewardship: *dominion*—managing land or treasure on behalf of a king or queen. The earth was the Lord's domain and thus deserved honor and reverence. And so it was for thousands of years.

And then along came the 18<sup>th</sup> century when certain people—mesmerized by technology and machinery—got it into their heads that the universe and the world was nothing but a machine that some clockmaker had invented, wound up and let run on its own according to mechanistic laws. And that was called “deism.”

And just like that the world was de-sacralized. Trees, animals, rivers were now seen as mere things to be used as instruments for man's pleasure. Dominion gave way to domination, which led to exploitation. Go ahead. Rape and pillage all you want for there are no spirits here or god out there to offend. Profits at any cost became the religion for generations of people, right up to this present time.

By the way, many of our founding fathers were deists. I'm not pointing fingers or placing blame. *I'm just sayin'.*

It's more complicated than I'm letting on, but that deistic notion, as it turns out, was a distortion of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Nevertheless, its popularity led a certain medieval historian at UCLA named Lynn White to blame environmental degradation entirely on Christianity just in time for the first Earth Day in 1970. That widely read essay aggravated a split between environmentalists and the Christian faith tradition, which only recently has begun to heal.

Since 1970 many of us have re-examined the historic roots of our tradition and now see things our predecessors missed in their rush to profit from reckless and cruel mistreatment of earth and its creatures. We see a wounded and bloody planet as though it were Jesus showing those nail-scarred hands to his friends.

Is that possible? Can Christ be seen as at-one with the earth? The Apostle Paul thought so. He saw the entire universe as "Christ." *In, through, by, and for Christ,* he declared, *all things exist.* Which is to say, love is all and in all for God is love. And love is personal and love is embodied.

Connect those dots from the foundation of our faith in Genesis and a dozen other places and you suddenly hear the Eucharistic language differently. *This is my body, this is my blood. How dare you forget that when you break the wheat to bake your bread or crush the blood out of a grape to ferment your wine, you are touching my body. All is One. And we are one.* No dualism allowed. We all come from the water!

The earth is the body of God. And yet God, like us, is more than the sum of the parts. We now even have a new word for that understanding: *pan-en-theism.*

Earth Day just like Easter invites us to remember who we are. We are children of the earth and part of the web of life. We are not above or better than. We live in community not only with other humans but also with our animal siblings. We live in community with trees and plants and rivers and oceans and microorganisms. We live because of the grace and generosity of a planet we did not create. It is a sheer gift.

We join with the earth and with each other.  
To bring new life to the land  
To restore the waters  
To refresh the air

We join with the earth and with each other.  
To renew the forests  
To care for the plants  
To protect the creatures

We join with the earth and with each other.  
To celebrate the seas  
To rejoice the sunlight

To sing the song of the stars

We join with the earth and with each other.

To recall our destiny

To renew our spirits

To reinvigorate our bodies

We join with the earth and with each other.

To create the human community

To promote justice and peace

To remember our children

We join together as many and diverse expressions of one loving mystery:  
for the healing of the earth and the renewal of all life.