



To Hope and Act with Creation

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost || September 1, 2024 || 9:30 am St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Hanover, MA || Proper 17B
|| Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9; Psalm 15; James 1:17-27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23 || The Reverend Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Esq.

Happy September 1st, Happy Labor Day Weekend, Happy World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. Many of you have perhaps started school, or have taken children or grandchildren back to school. Earlier this week there was a little fall nip in the early morning air, marking a change of season.

Today is the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation – a day set aside to pray in thanksgiving for the health of our planet and the abundance that God provided in creation. It is a day that connects us to religious communities and prayerful people around the globe who are similarly setting aside time for reverence and appreciation, and a day to examine our own connections and relationship to God's creation.

Dozens of our Episcopal lay leaders, bishops and clergy members worked to pass a resolution that connects us to other world religions marking this day, and they put together a suggested curriculum with prayers, readings and hymns to focus our worship time together on the gifts of creation, and on God's expectations for our responsible stewardship of the resources and abundance around us. We have incorporated those prayers and words into this morning's service, so if they are unfamiliar or we are stumbling a bit, we are invited to reflect on God as creator.

This is not an easy milieu. Many of us have very different relationships with nature or with the politics swirling around climate change. My appreciation for nature goes way back to some of my earliest memories. As a child, I distinctly remember the impression made when our kindergarten class grew lettuce and other vegetables and picked our first harvest and made peanut butter and lettuce sandwiches. My grandparents always had a garden, and I am blessed with memories of sitting under their willow tree shucking peas and corn that turned into the most delicious parts of our summer dinners together. We knew when there had been

The Rev'd Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Esq.
St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Hanover, MA
September 1, 2024 ||1 of 4

enough rain, or too much and what the impact was on the produce they were growing. I have not had the experience of depending on those foods as my only sustenance, though I went to school with classmates who were dependent on the food they farmed.

We are bombarded with depressing messages about the state of our climate and the impact we humans are having on the planet. This week alone I was yelled at by headlines that included:

- Mosquito-Borne Equine Encephalitis Is Keeping People Indoors After Dark
- Heat index in Chicago blamed for increase deaths
- Namibia, Facing Drought, Plans to Kill Elephants for Meat
- Runners are used to toughing it out. A warming climate can make that deadly
- Turbine blades have piled up in Landfills. A solution may be coming.
- Something's Poisoning America's Farms. Scientists Fear 'Forever' Chemicals.

I'll confess that I couldn't read each of the articles, but I did read some of them, and they were dispiriting -- and the story about the elephants in Namibia was overwhelming. I've just been to Botswana and saw those elephants on both sides of the Chobe River with their knowing and soulful eyes, protecting their babies and playing in giant watering holes. The idea that Namibians would have to turn to those elephants as a food source to prevent mass starvation is heart-breaking.

Our faith does not allow us to simply read and do nothing. To freeze in fear, or to become overwhelmed and numb to these stories. We are a people of hope, love and optimism. God does not delight in us becoming impassive. We are not called on to learn about such heartbreaking stories and sit, resigned in our places -- even our places of worship. God asks us to act.

We heard this declaration in James this morning. We must be "doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves." After reading or listening to a good dose of national headlines what are we to do?

The enormous concepts of climate change and climate justice can seem overwhelming. There are thousands of articles written about whether one person can make a difference. Thank God, the consensus is YES, we can each make little changes that will amount to lightening our personal footprints on the planet. But when faced with rising sea levels or PFAS (Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)) being found across huge swathes of farmland and in livestock -- it is understandable that we might get overwhelmed.

I hope that you will join me in taking comfort in today's world prayer observance. That is the beauty of joining our prayers and voices together with siblings around the world in recognition of the World Day of Prayer for Creation Care. Today inaugurates a season that will extend all month and will culminate in our celebration of St. Francis and the blessing of the animals on Sunday, October 6th. This season has special readings and prayers designed to connect us to the gift of God's creation. To remind us that we are stewards of this perfect gift – mother earth, our island home.

I invite each of us to find time to appreciate and give thanks for the beauty that surrounds us – whether it is in the exquisite design of a flower that is blooming, the lovely altar flowers, or the sight of deep green foliage against the sapphire sky – find time to notice and to give thanks. Even if you just remind yourself to look up as you move from your apartment to your car – to look up and take a deep breath in – expand your lungs and give thanks. Give thanks for the air that we breathe and for the beauty that surrounds us. That moment of connection can invite better stewardship.

If you are lucky enough to live where you can hear children at play, give thanks for their joy and delight and the continued safety and availability of the fresh air and water that they need.

I have great faith that some scientists are going to help us leapfrog forward into the planet saving space, and I am committed to some personal responsibility. My contributions include not using Amazon next day delivery, unless it is truly an emergency. I've reverted back to glass storage containers, which would delight my grandmother, and I pay attention to plastic packaging. I am positive that there are thousands more modifications that I could make to lessen my draw on the planet's resources and I'm committed to trying them out. I've become wildly competitive with my neighbors and our energy usage. Do you get those statements? It is a source of pride to be in the lowest consumption category when I can be.

What if we all spent some time thinking and praying about how church could support conservation and how we might make our love of our planet a bit easier to express? If you have ideas that we might implement, please let me know. If you've found easy or successful ways to conserve resources – I'm all ears for that too. I am optimistic about some of the progress we might make together between now and the Feast of St. Francis.

We are each invited to fill the silence and reflection time that follows with our own prayer of appreciation and confession for our stewardship of the planet.

Let us pray:

Bountiful God, you call us to labor with you in tending the earth: Where we lack love, open our hearts to the world; where we waste, give us discipline to conserve; where we neglect, awaken our minds and wills to insight and care. May we with all your creatures honor and serve you in all things, for you live and reign with Christ, Redeemer of all, and with your Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.