

Rev. Kirstie Engel

Sermon title: Letter from the Mother Earth

Scripture: Romans 8: 19-23

When approaching this text in Romans, to be honest, I was completely clueless of how or what to say about this passage, let alone see how the environment tied in with it. I was even more discouraged when I did my research on this scripture and even the commentators said, if you think you understand the Book of Romans, then you have misunderstood. Well that is encouraging right?

What we do know and scholars agree is that Paul is the writer of this book. Then as I started to peel back the layers of the usage of the word creation and children of God in this text, I realized that Paul is presenting to us a parallel situation that is affecting both humanity and creation. Furthermore, the inspiration for me to preach this sermon as if Mother Earth herself is talking to humanity directly, was because of the impact that a recent trip to Puerto Rico with Motive college students under the leadership of Pastor Michelle Chesnut.

Now I was raised in Brooklyn NY in the Clinton Hill, Fort Green area and I did not live in one of the nicer brownstones. However, I had 3 square meals a day, I had a literal roof over my head, I had running water, I had hot water, I had electricity etc. Family, I was not prepared for what my husband, myself and Pastor Michelle and her team would encounter. Homes where running water was a luxury and if they did have running water, it was cold and the water pressure was non-existent. Homes missing roofs, but the families were still living there. Babies walking barefoot in less than desirable conditions. In our first two days of one of worksites, I raised a fit, because there was nowhere for us to use the bathroom when needed.

One of the options finally was a woman's house across the street and they did not have running water and the toilet of course did not flush. I advocated to the top of the leadership chain to get a running bathroom facility and the next day the family had a flusher installed in their bathroom. They still did not have running water to the sink.

It seemed that neighbors had a garden hose water system of some sort. This did not stop the community from making us delicious Puerto Rico delicacies. So anyway I witnessed like the scripture says both creation and humanity groaning in Puerto Rico. Ironically at the same time, Nebraska was and still is in a flooding crisis.

Nebraska residents and the levees are groaning in the flood situation. So all of this and more is what inspired me to really look at the world in a different way and write this letter from what I envision Mother Earth's perspective to be; realizing that caring for the environment is an important form of justice for both creation and humanity.

Furthermore, both creation and humanity are interdependent upon one another. Which means that we need creation and creation needs us to do our part. So I hope that this letter inspires you all in the way that it has inspired me:

To Whom It May Concern;

This is Mother Earth speaking on behalf of creation. And just so you are clear on who or what is involved in this creation. I am speaking on behalf of the darkness that hovered over the surface of the deep. I am speaking on behalf of the dome that you all know to be the sky.

I am speaking on behalf of the living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” I am speaking on behalf of the fish of the sea; on behalf of the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth. I am speaking on behalf of the ocean, the rocks, the mountains and the valleys. I am speaking on behalf of the stars, the sun, the moon, the air. I am speaking on behalf of every tree with seed in its fruit; every beast of the earth, every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth.

I am speaking on behalf of everything that has the breath of life. To let you all know, descendants of Adam and Eve; to let you all know, children of Abraham and Sarah; to let you all know, residents of Lancaster County; that we creation are waiting.

We are in earnest expectation, straining forward with outstretched head, just as one might imagine the crowds outside a race or people straining over the ropes to catch a glimpse of the runners; to be released from our oppression; to be rescued from our captivity.

For we understand that you homo-sapiens are curious. We understand that humanity in many ways are autonomous. You are in fact designed and created to be free at will to think and explore and do as you choose. So much so that we also understand that we, creation were handed over to be completely entrusted in your care.

We are in effect your endowment from our Creator. Intentionally created to be your aid, delicately designed to be your sustenance, compassionately created to be your comforter, Lovingly manifested to be your sanctuary.

And for the record I believe that we creation have met those needs. I believe that creation is still meeting those needs for you. As an example, many of you may not like insects... but have you considered that many beneficial garden insects actually improve soil, pollinate plants or kill off nasty insects that harm plants.

Have you considered that the birds also help plants grow by eating insects that are eating the plants? Have you considered that without honeybees and wild bees and other insects, the majority of our food crops would disappear without being pollinated? And friends don't mistake my letter to be about insects and birds, but to highlight that creation is meeting your needs....this is just one instance to bring to your attention.

The fact is we (creation) are constantly hard at work in some obvious, but often undetected and subtle ways, doing everything we can to fulfill what we were designed to do; which ultimately benefits you.

So I write this letter to ask you have you considered— how you and I; how creation and humanity are interconnected? Have you considered that without one, there would not be the other? We are in fact connected so much, that when you hurt...we hurt. When you groan, we groan.

Furthermore, when I trace where our relationship and bond was formed. It started with the land, deep in the ground. From dust we came, from dust we shall return. You and I; creation and humanity are connected. From the very same substance as the material universe that surrounds you and I— carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, hydrogen, etc.; we are connected.

Furthermore where creation and humanity went awry...it goes back to the land. The bloodshed of humanity like the story of Cain and Abel when people stopped caring. The negligence of the land, deforestation, water pollution, soil degradation and more. From the flooding of the world, most recently in your very own backyard. to impoverished areas like Puerto Rico where running water and plumbing is a luxury; to unsanitary living conditions because of lack of resources and aid; to oil fires; to poisonous gas leaks; to oil spills and the impact on the sea animals; to deforestation and the list goes on and on and on-- I am writing to you humanity; letting you know that all of this and more has occurred on the very land that was supposed to be fruitful and alive....and yet we are groaning.

We are groaning because of all of the carelessness and manipulation and apathy and neglect and devastation and pain that has seeped into the ground...suffocating us.

We are groaning...we are crying out to our Creator for our freedom because we..... can'tbreathe!

And so I write to you humanity, beckoning you to help us to breathe again. Help us to all return to the way we were intended to be; one breath, in perfect sync and harmony together. And some of you may think that this is an impossible request. But I ask you to consider this; to remember that just as we all came from dust and to dust we shall return.

We must also remember that we are not just dust alone. We also are the breath of God. Do you remember how scripture tells us that God breathed into humanity's nostrils the breath of life and that is how humanity became living beings? Well creation and humanity share this in common as well.

It took the breath of God to create the heavens and the earth. It took the breath of God to create the darkness and the light. It took the breath of God to create the sea and the living creatures that swim and fly and crawl. It took the breath of God to create you and to create me; both humanity and creation, we were created in the same breath.

So I conclude this letter to remind you, children of God that together we can and will obtain the freedom of the glory of our Creator.... but we must not forget to breathe in the breath of God that is in all of us.

We must breathe in the breath of God and remember the beauty of God's greatest masterpiece; both humanity and creation together. We must breathe in the breath of God and not forget to nurture and care for the very land we were formed from. We must breathe in the breath of God and recognize that it is God's breath that sustains us. We must breathe in the breath of God who will lead us to our salvation—a life that is free and filled with love and environmental harmony and peace for all.

And so as Mother Earth speaking on behalf of creation, I write to let humanity know that we are waiting. And to let you know we are hopeful! For although we are not where we need to be, I am encouraged to see the breath of God rising in you again through your efforts.

I see the breath of God arise in your efforts of rebuilding after devastation. I see the breath of God arise when you come together, determined to make a difference. I see the breath of God arise when you come together in love and harmony. I see the breath of God arise when you share your time and resources with the goal of setting things right again.

And yes, yes I know that Creation plays a part in this as well.

And I can assure you that creation will keep doing everything we can to continue to provide shelter and food and a sanctuary for you. Even though there are things that I as Mother Earth produce such as natural disasters that happen all on its own...I'll try and work on that. I write to you to remind you that we are connected. You and I; creation and humanity were formed from the ground but in one breath; in God's breath, we live on to a place where together we are in perfect sync and harmony. If we remember to just breathe together God's breath by way of showing mutual love, respect and care for one another! Love to you always and always with you; Mother Earth!