

## **Creator's Call to Notice and Listen:**

This morning in our experiencing the story time, in our reader's theatre, and in the prayer that Barb just led us in, we were called in different ways to *Notice* and to *Listen*: to notice and listen to the creation telling us what God is like; to notice through the movement of our bodies what direction we face and in this noticing to acknowledge the ways that in every direction, we encounter creation as an abundant gift of the creator. If you were "listening" closely to the reader's theatre, you might have also noticed a kind of story being told—a story with a beginning, a middle plot, and a vision for how the story can end. Let's take a moment and see how well we caught the main movements of that story. I need your help. Where did the Reader's theatre, read by Paul and Sarah, begin this morning? What were we first invited to notice about the world around us?

1. An acknowledgment of creation's goodness and inherit worth as created by God and as participant in praising God.
2. To a recognition of how the goodness of creation has been at time overshadowed by the curse of sin, disaster, and the effects of disharmony—the attempt for one creature especially, the human, to "make a name for itself."
3. A vision of a man, Jesus, who spoke prophetically of the calling of his disciples to be meek, to inherit the earth through service and humility, not through greed and domination.
4. A vision of a future of things restored and with blessing coursing through creation.

Good! Yes. We have some attentive, active listeners here. You know, as I sought to read across the grand story of scripture as I wrote the reader's theatre for this morning's service, I couldn't help but notice that scripture really does have this sweeping story and movement pulsing through

it -- a story of a vast creation, with a diverse and abundant cast of created characters, blessed by God and beautifully drawn together in praise to the Creator. All you have to do is flip through the different texts of scripture and you will be amazed at all the different characters within it: fields, rivers, trees, land, fields, hills, mountains, rocks, sea creatures, land animals, human beings, birds, wind, rain, sunshine, stars, the heavens—and the list could keep going—all telling God's glory, all participants in God's story. This is a story of God's good creation, ordered and governed by laws built into it, natural laws like those that govern seasons and climates, laws of gravity, physics, and chemistry—and special laws communicated to human beings, laws of work and Sabbath, of holiness codes and worship rituals and, most important among all laws, the law of love.

**But**, you also don't need to flip far through scripture to notice that among the beauty and blessing and the laws that bring a sense of order and harmony, there is also a story of creation *disordered*, of laws broken to ill effect, and of the blessing turned to the curse. And all too often, this disorder and curse is introduced through the actions and inactions of the human creature, the creature made in the image of God. I suspect that this is part of the story we are all too familiar with, even if we would rather focus on the first part—the blessing and the beauty.

**But** thankfully, as I flipped through scripture while writing this reader's theatre, I also noticed time and again how the curse was never God's vision for the story, that this story also had woven through it like a red thread a bold vision of a different destiny for creation; a destiny in which God redeems that which had been enslaved, and sets things right again and again, through gifts of new beginnings and second chances; a destiny in which God draws the created order to completion in the image of the humble and meek and wild and powerful Jesus, who

lived, died, and was raised again to draw all creation—the whole cast of characters—to healing and new life, and to the drawing together of heaven and earth.

Let's face it though, this scriptural story that I have just been speaking about, this story with such a diverse cast of creaturely characters, has too often been told as a story about only one type of character, with all their potential and with all of their problems. Scripture has all too often been read as if it were a story *only* about human beings, their goodness and worth, their failings and their curse, and the possibilities of their redemption and healing. Too many tellings of the story, see the creation, redemption, and consummation of human life as the sole purpose of the story, with all the stuff that God made and blessed before us as a mere lead up to the best creature whose destiny was to one day leave earth behind anyway. Similarly, too many tellings of what is often called “the fall” of humanity, have explained that fall as if it only impacted the hearts of people, and not also the heart of the vast created order. And too many times, tellings of God's redemptive plan have focused on the redemption and renewal of individual souls in isolation from or separate from the renewal of all created reality. In short, too often when we tell the grand story of scripture, we tell it through too narrow a lens, a human centered lens.

This is not really surprising! After all, from the moment we wake up in the morning to the moment when we lie down at night, we are concerned and occupied with ourselves and with those around us that we care for—concerned with our well-being, our work, our health, our dreams, our passions, and our futures. No one can nor really should ever get away from being concerned with ourselves and with those we love. And amidst life, when we look around and notice God's work among us and when we stop and listen for God's call to us, it is only right that we do so to discern God's call on *our* life, *our* vocation, and *our* future. We can't do it any other way.

However, what we discover from the beginning of scripture is that to be concerned for ourselves *is* to be concerned with our place and role as one character within God’s vast creation. From the moment that God placed the human being in the garden to “till and keep it,” and from the moment that God gave human beings laws to keep, God gave a vocation to us that would uniquely situate us within our environment as not only its beneficiary but also its “keeper.” Now I have another question for you this morning: **if you want to be a good “keeper,”—and because I know we have a cattle farmer here, let’s say we are talking about keeping and protecting a herd of cattle—if you want to be a good keeper of your herd, what some of the most basic and elementary skills you need to have? What are some of the most important things you need to do to protect and keep that herd? → \*Responses\* With an emphasis on “Notice” and “Listen.”**

Yes! So, let me ask you another question: **what if you put all the things in place that you needed for your herd, let’s say a good pasture, plenty of food and water, and good fences, but then you walked away and said, I sure hope the herd will stay healthy and then you went home and took a holiday for the rest of the season? What might happen? (Disease, drought, predators, etc.)**

Right, so to be a good “keeper,” here of a herd of cattle, you need to practice some very important, daily disciplines and among the most important of those disciplines are to “notice” and to “listen.” I have learned this from the time I have spent on my in-laws farm doing ride-alongs with my Father in law, Menno. Every time he takes the tractor to the field, Dad will look, and he will listen: look at the cattle and their surroundings, listen to the sounds they are making (is one or more of them sick? Are they upset by something? Is there a coyote in the area?). Noticing and listening, as many here today well know, are very important skills for a farmer. But

you know what, I believe that these are very important skills and disciplines for all of us, no matter what vocation we have. In fact, I believe that the Creator has called all human beings to “notice” and to “listen” to the creation as a core part of our vocation as creatures in the world. I think this vocation is especially important to highlight today, at a time in history where we are becoming more and more aware of the ways that the “garden” we’ve been given to keep and protect, the world with its complex weather systems, its diverse habitats, its vast oceans, and its numerous species, is in trouble, and in large part because modern, industrial-age human beings have been ignoring our vocation to keep the garden of the Lord.

In many ways our modern, industrial age has made us prone to forget our vocation as “keepers” of the garden. And part of the reason I think this is the case is because our industrial age has increasingly alienated us from the processes that allow us to live—everything from food production to the production of our clothing, to the most basic realities of the power that provides us with light, shelter, and warmth through the cold of winter. Our modern technologies have led us to forget that we too are dependent, earth-bound creatures. Too often we have acted as though we were above and separate from the created order, rather than creatures within it. And do you know what’s surprising? Even though this forgetfulness has become acute or especially bad in our modern age, it is not new; it has been with us as a human fault from time immemorial. In fact, there are two key moments already in the book of Genesis where the human tendency to forget that we are creatures occurs: first, there was the moment of eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and second, there was the moment when we decided to try to build the tower of Babel. Both stories involve the human attempt to set itself apart from the rest of the created order: to “be like God,” in the one case and in the next case to “make a name for itself” in prideful distinction from everything else. Throughout times long past and now in spectacular

fashion today, we have repeated these early attempts to separate ourselves from the rest of the created order without regard for our God ordained limitations and the impact our prideful aspirations have on the non-human world around us.

Of course, the truth is we have never actually been able to separate ourselves from the rest of the created order precisely because we rely on environments that we don't always have control over to provide us with the sustenance and habitat to make life livable. The farmers among us, those who provide us with the basic sustenance of our lives know this best. What happens, though, when we see ourselves as separate from the rest of the created order is that we begin to think about the rest of the created order as a mere instrument for our well-being, a means to an end, a wild creature to be tamed and dominated, instead of a vast, complicated, beautiful, and fragile web of interconnection that deserves our respect and our care. When we instrumentalize the created order, we stop regarding it, we stop noticing it and listening to it; to its praise of the creator and to its groanings.

Recently, Mennonite Church Canada's Indigenous-Settler Relations and the Sustainability Leadership Group led a spirited eight-week conversation on the topic of "Creator's Call in a Climate Emergency"—this is where the title on your bulletin came from. During those eight-weeks, several guest speakers were invited to lead participants in considering what concrete, practical actions God, our creator, is calling us to in order to address what the organizers called the "climate emergency." I suspect that for many of us this title is unsettling, and I would think that some of us are even a bit put-off by it as sounding a bit like fearmongering. We all know how fraught and divisive the climate conversation can be.

Lately as I have been thinking about the surge of concern within the scientific community over climate change, I have been personally challenged by the realization that I do not have the

ecological literacy necessary to “notice” and “listen” to the creation, especially to its groanings. While more recent events around the world, the obvious climate disasters we’ve witnessed, give awareness to problems in creation, I suspect that few of us know—certainly I do not—the inner workings of climate science enough to make the connections between such events and larger climate trends. And so, I have been personally challenged as of late, to try to understand the urgency behind the voices of climate scientists and Christian climate justice advocates who are sounding the alarm about human caused climate change. I have challenged myself to try to understand their call and consider how that call might also be the call of our Creator. I find myself respecting the fact that they have, throughout their lives, taken the time to stop, to notice, and to listen to the creation as it groans under the effects of unchecked human growth and industrial expansion. And I find myself wondering this morning what we can learn from each other in this community, what we can learn about everything from broader climate justice issues to the more specific understandings of our local ecology and environment, its beauty and perhaps also its groanings. I find myself wondering how our community might expand our ecological literacy so that we might embody in greater measure “God’s reconciling ministry for all creation.” Perhaps part of God’s new Pentecost for us as a church will be the Spirit’s movement among us calling us through word and deed to proclaim God’s justice and wholeness for all of creation.

And so, as I come to the end of this reflection on the importance of heeding the Creator’s call to “notice” and to “listen” to the creation, I leave our congregation with a challenge: Let us strive to increase our ecological literacy, our capacity to notice and listen to the created order in which we exist. What might this look like? Of course, the answer to this question could be very

diverse since there are many ways to become more ecologically literate. That said, here are some suggestions, for what they are worth.

1. Perhaps we could do more to understand our local habitat – property, ecological diversity, etc. Notice things we may have never noticed before.
2. Beyond the local, perhaps we could try to spend some time studying the basics of climate science and climate change. What does the science say? We could listen to the voices of those who have spent the time and hard work of noticing the way the delicate climate systems of the world work.
3. We could also read scripture together with an eye to the worth and dignity of the non-human world. We could ask ourselves as we read: what cast of characters have we missed? How do the stories of scripture involve justice and wholeness not only for humans but also for the whole created order?
4. Finally, we can make the groanings of creation a part of our prayer life.

These are just suggestions, but perhaps they are a basic starting point to discuss further. We are now going to sing together the Hymn “Touch the Earth Lightly,” a fitting hymn to draw together both the promise and peril of our human vocation of “keeping” the garden of God. May we notice and listen to the words of this hymn and may the words inspire us to live fully into God’s calling as creatures of care. AMEN.