

WGUMC Easter Sunday April 16, 2017
Earth Tells the Easter Story Matthew 28:1-10

Charles Wesley wrote, "Christ the Lord is risen today, Earth and heaven in chorus say...." So both earth and heaven celebrate Easter today. And that means that we hairless apes aren't the only part of God's good creation caught up in Jesus' resurrection.

I like to call Matthew the Green Gospel because it's the only Gospel that gives the earth a chance to tell the Easter story. In Matthew, we read about how the sun was shrouded and darkness fell on the whole land from noon until 3 as Jesus hung from the cross on Good Friday. And at the very moment of his death, the earth shook, the rocks were split, and the tombs were opened.

Obviously, the gospel writer wanted us to know that the earth itself recoiled in horror at the crucifixion. And then a few days later, he tells us that the earth rejoiced at the resurrection. When it was still dark on the first day of the week,

as Mary and the other Mary were coming to the tomb, suddenly the earth began to shake, as if the earth itself had something important to say.

Now some will doubt that the Creation is endowed with anything like intention. They won't buy the idea that the earth had a part to play in witnessing to the resurrection. But the more sensitive souls among us just might be open to the suggestion.

The 14th-century German mystic, Meister Eckhart, once said, "The Father speaks the Son from his entire power and he speaks him in all things. All creatures are words of God."

[Sermon One, in *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation*, ed. by Matthew Fox, 1980] If Meister Eckhart is right, if all creatures can tell us something about what God was speaking in Christ, then the earth has quite a story to tell. Let's listen:

"I am the Earth. In the beginning, I was a formless void until God called me into being. [Genesis 1:2] I was the dust of the ground, dust that came from exploding stars. One day God scooped me up and shaped me into a man. Then God gave this man my name. *Adam* means 'of the ground.' But Adam did not want to be grounded. He didn't want to be *made* of me, but Master of me. And because he denied his fundamental connection to dirt, I came to bear his curse. God said to Adam, "...cursed is the ground because of you." No longer would living be easy, but Adam would have to work me until the day he returned to me. The Lord said, "By the sweat of your face you shall eat your bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust and to dust you shall return."

[Genesis 3:17, 19]

Adam may have brought on the curse but Cain and Abel managed to make things much worse. Refusing to be his brother's keeper, Cain decided to be his brother's killer. I am

the Earth that was soaked with his brother's blood, and in protest, I cried out to God. So I was glad when God finally sent a great flood to wash the world clean. I was relieved to be rid of the stains.

Unfortunately, that wasn't the end of human sin, nor is it the end of my story. I was the far country for Abraham's journey. I was the escape route when Jacob stole his brother's patrimony. I was the road down to Egypt when Joseph was sold into slavery. When God called Moses from the burning bush and told him to take off his sandals, I was the holy ground Moses was standing on. And when he led the people to freedom through the Red Sea, I was the dry ground they walked on.

I was the mountain that Moses climbed to receive God's commands. I was the wilderness he wandered in for forty years. I was the Promised Land. But my blessed ground soon enough became a perpetual battleground. So much blood has been shed on me by kings and armies and families.

But God never stopped speaking to them, trying to get through to them through me. If people had just paid attention. As the psalm says, "The heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork" but they couldn't hear it. [Psalm 19:1] As Paul writes, "Ever since the creation of the world, God's eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, can be understood and seen through the things God has made" [Romans 1:20] but they did not understand and they refused to see.

Since no one was listening to God's Word spoken through me, God had to send his Word to live in you. The Word he sent was Love and when it took flesh, I was the earth that cradled his holy birth. I was home for the one who came to take away the curse.

I got to witness firsthand his ministry. Jesus once made a mud from me and helped a blind man see. Another time, he kneeled down and with his finger wrote something in my sand

and forgave the woman caught in adultery. He loved to tell stories about farmers planting seeds in me and flocks grazing on me, and he told his followers to consider my lilies. For three years, I felt him walk on me as he went about showing and telling you that love has always been the goal of the creation, the endpoint, the omega point of your physical, mental and spiritual evolution.

Love was his direction and his destination. But for the powers that be, love was a threat to their domination. So they plotted against love; they vowed to kill the Word. On the night he was betrayed, Love went out and fell down in the garden to pray. I cradled him again. I heard his cries. I dried his tears. But I could not stop the temple police. During the trial and the scourging, I was as helpless as he. They put a spear through my heart, when the soldiers dug a hole in me to secure the cross on Calvary. Once he was good and dead, they gave him back to me.

In those three short days, while his body was buried in me, I learned the true power of that Word. I saw the full glory of that Love. And at the dawn of Easter Day, I shook with delight to be a witness to his resurrection life. Then and there I made a commitment to you that every year, I would testify to the life that is in him because it is also in me and because it is in me, I can offer it to you. Look at how the rains have greened my hills. Look at how the flowers have graced my fields. Every cloud in the sky, every blade of grass on the ground speaks of the love that in Christ is found. Come every spring, it is resurrection all around!

Though it is just as true any other time of year, at this time of year it is easier to believe in the power of love that walks the way of beauty, not cruelty; the way of peace, not hostility; the way of justice, not oppression; the way of compassion, not coercion; the way of reconciliation, not retribution; the way of cooperation, not competition; the way

of communion, not isolation. And if you can believe in the power of the resurrection, you, too, can walk right into God's new creation!

Then, because Christ the Lord is risen today, with earth and heaven in chorus you say:

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces
peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." [Isaiah 52:7]

I am the Earth and this is my Easter story. Thank you for listening. Now receive my blessing.