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Isaiah 58: 1 – 12  
2 Corinthians 5: 20b – 6:10

Psalms 103: 8 – 14  
Matthew 6: 1 – 6, 16 – 21

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**“...and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.”**

Lent. The name of this season in the church year goes back at least 800 years, and it comes from the Old English ‘lencten’ or Middle English ‘lente,’ which means “springtime.” Springtime, with bulb plants like tulips and hyacinths poking their little spring-green colored heads through the soil. Springtime, with birds chirping, courting and building nests. Springtime, with the smell of fresh rain lingering in the air. Springtime, with the first purplish-pink blossoms on the flowering quince and redbuds, and the little sunshine faces of the daffodils. At least in this part of the world, spring is a beautiful, colorful season full of new life and color and possibilities, an awakening from the death-like, gray and brownness of winter. But none of that is what we usually think of when we think of Lent.

Lent, for many of us, probably conjures up images more like the slumbering dullness of winter. A cheerless time of deprivation and heaviness. But maybe, it isn’t meant to be like that. What if we see Lent as an awakening to possibilities? An opportunity for new life and growth, like a lush, well-watered garden? And perhaps an opportunity to ponder our relationship with Creation which surrounds us and of which we are a part? What if we use the season of Lent, of springtime, to consider our role as stewards of Creation and what that might mean for both the privileges and the responsibilities we have in living out our faith? Perhaps it’s time we recognize Creation-Care is a vital part of our piety, an essential aspect of our expressed relationship with God.

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” That’s the wisdom that Jesus gives us. Do we treasure Creation as an incredible – and essential – gift from God, or do we go through our daily lives blind to the change of seasons, not even noticing whether it’s raining or the sun is shining unless it interferes with our plans? Even if we’re not into gardening or yardwork, do we take the time to realize where our food is coming from and the footprint we are leaving on creation? When we turn on the water for a shower or to wash the dishes, we expect it to be hot and clean. Do we ever stop to think about how much water we consume, how much we waste, and how many people in the world not only don’t have hot water, but water that is safe to drink? When we adjust the thermostat to keep ourselves in the insulated little cubicle of our home or office or classroom or car, do we consider how much of the earth’s resources we are utilizing and what effect that has on Creation?

“Is this not the fast I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice?” How much does our consumption of resources, our failure to repair, reuse and recycle, and our pollution of Creation disproportionately affect the poor? “Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house?” How much does our hogging of water, food and energy inhibit others around the globe from sharing in the richness of God’s Creation? How do we even begin to satisfy the needs of the afflicted when we are so preoccupied with not only meeting our needs, but satisfying all of our wants?

So, how are we doing as stewards of Creation? Lent is a time to examine where we have missed the mark, where we have fallen short of the glory of God. In a few moments, as we go through the Litany of Penitence, we will confess to ‘our waste and pollution of [God’s] Creation, and our lack of concern for those who come after us.’ All too often, we excuse ourselves for the things we should be doing and don’t and the things we shouldn’t be doing but do by thinking that we are merely one measly drop in the bucket in an ocean of water and that what we do or don’t do won’t make any difference in the environment. Except that what we do or don’t do does have an effect: 1) air so polluted that people need

to wear masks; 2) fertilizers and pesticides that leech into our river systems, causing cancers and malformed fish and aquatic life; 3) agriculture that produces plenty of food for everyone in the world but isn't able to get it to everyone because of our greed and struggle for power. But the reverse is true, too. What you and I do during these forty days of Lent, of springtime, matters to help turn things around. "Preach the Gospel always and sometimes use words," St. Francis reportedly said. St. Francis, a man who early on appreciated the virtue of Creation. When we show that we care about God's Creation, then the people around us begin to see it as something of value as well.

God set humankind down in the midst of a garden, Eden, and when all is redeemed, the imagery in the book of Revelation is as a new, renewed garden. "Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations," Isaiah says. "You shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in." Now is the time. Here is the place. Let us make a right start, a good beginning to Lent by reminding ourselves of our interdependence with Creation, and by recommitting ourselves to a mindful, responsible stewardship of this fragile earth, our island home, God's precious, life-giving gift to us.

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