

“Environmental Justice”

The Rev. Drew Willard
UCC at The Villages, FL
April 22nd, 2012

Psalm 4:1-8

Luke 24:36b-48

‘6 There are some who ask, “Who will be good to us?”

Let your kindness, LORD, shine brightly on us.

7 You brought me more happiness

than a rich harvest of grain and grapes.’

Psalm 4:6-7

Let us pray... O God,

There are some who ask, “Who will be good to us?” –

but then they just help themselves.

Show us how to be good stewards of the bounty you have given us

for the sake of the Earth itself and the generations yet to come,

for we are all in the same boat.

Amen

The Holocaust Observance last Thursday was quite an event –
as those of you who were there can attest.

We all learned more about our Jewish brothers & sisters
and the legacy of the Holocaust.

It was also an opportunity for the religious community of The Villages’ area
to reflect on that event and share our support.

One of my colleagues, The Rev. Zach Harris,
pastor of the Rock of Ages Lutheran Church in Wildwood,
is a regular speaker at this event,
who characteristically opens his remarks with, ‘Shalom, y’all!’

In his message, he drew comparisons between the Holocaust and the co-incidence
that this past week was 100 years since the tragic sinking of the RMS Titanic.

And he made a point about how certain groups of people can be marginalized –
how there was inadequate provision for third class passengers to escape.

Their inability to pay for better accommodations and social attitudes of neglect
marked them for death just as surely as the Nazis’ intentional genocide
against the Jewish people.

Another co-incidence about the Titanic followed the next day, for me personally –
After running an errand in Lady Lake, I stopped in at the
Minnetonka Moccasin Trading Post just to check it out.

The merchant there was a fellow named Don and we got to talking;

A music CD was playing – an ensemble album composed about the Titanic;

and the principal composer in the project was a Native American musician
named Arvel Bird.

I was curious to know why a Native American would feel so inspired
to take on such a project, so I bought the CD.

Willard, p.2

A series of events led me back to the Trading Post within the hour –
and this happened to be the occasion for another co-incidence.

Don happened to be on the phone – as it turned out, with Arvel Bird himself.

Don handed me the phone and said I was meant to talk with him.

Arvel told me that the journey of the Titanic – setting out from the shores of Ireland
to go to North America, had personal significance for him

as a person of Scottish Celtic heritage as well as Native American Paiute,
who made his own sea journey to Scotland to learn about his ancestry.

So, this series of co-incidental events has served to encourage me
to incorporate the Titanic as a metaphor in today's message.

A little research about the Titanic and its fateful voyage tells us that
there were about 2,200 people on board;

more than 1,500 died with the ship or froze in the water;
with only 712 surviving in boats of which there had only been enough
for half the people anyway.

Some of the wealthiest people of the world were on the Titanic's maiden voyage
and about a third of all on board were traveling 3rd Class as immigrants
to America for a new start in life.

The Titanic's passengers and crew were from 44 different countries
who likewise represented human-kind with all our courage and folly
on that fatal night voyage in April 1912.

Not exactly the 1% versus 99%, but we can't escape the comparison with current events
and fears that our world economy has been on a similar course with the Titanic –
'too big to fail', so to speak.

But let's change course just a bit and consider the Earth itself as being a vessel
for all of God's creatures and not just human-kind.

There was a time when the oceans seemed so vast they could not be crossed;
there were forests so deep there was no end to the wood they could provide
for construction and fuel.

As sea travel became more sophisticated, people came to the New World
and found beaver pelts for a market in men's hats.

And other markets arose with new industries for cotton and tobacco.

Then, whales were hunted for oil to meet the growing demands of energy
besides coal and later petroleum.

But these resources have been progressively clear cut, hunted, or fished out;

And now even the oceans themselves are becoming polluted – too acidic
for microscopic life needed to feed fish at the bottom of the food chain
which support the bigger fish and us at the top.

Willard, p.3

'Global warming' is a dirty word for some,

but there are many other ways our environment is being neglected.

Yet the most immediate issue short of the whole planet sinking into a toxic wasteland, is that the people who are affected most are usually those who are poor.

Rev. Linda Jaramillo is the Executive Minister for Justice & Witness Ministries of the UCC and she writes:

The United Church of Christ helped to birth...

the environmental justice movement in 1987

when the UCC Commission for Racial Justice published

its legendary study, "Toxic Waste and Race"...[and]coined the terms

"environmental racism" and "environmental justice."

The challenge is for us all to...

understand the process by which communities of color across this nation have become toxic waste sites.

[and]understand the connections between race and poverty

and how our communities of color are more likely

to be unhealthy places to live, work and play.

Most importantly, we hope that [everyone will] find ways

to become involved in cleaning up our communities

and in preventing new toxic waste sites from being dumped.

For we know that toxic wastes released into the water and air

of communities of color don't just stay in them,

they threaten every American everywhere.

[just as] Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr... said,

"an injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

'Another World is Possible'.

But only if we all get busy and clean up this one!

http://www.ucc.org/justice/advocacy_resources/pdfs/environmental-justice/almost-everything-you-need-to-know-about-environmental-justice-english-version.pdf

Indeed, not only the people of our country,

but the world itself and all its creatures are at risk, too,

with the undisciplined use of non-renewable energy sources

like coal and petroleum that contribute to pollution.

And the effect has been described as 'global warming'

with disputed consequences of 'climate change'.

Melting icecaps will mean decreasing shorelines as seawater pushes inland –

and for Florida, that could affect millions of people in the Miami-area

and around the coast.

But before we despair over similarities with the Titanic,

let us also remember the example of Noah's Ark.

Willard, p.4

The Earth itself is our Ark – our Spaceship Earth, traveling in a zone of habitability neither too close to its star nor too far away – neither too hot nor too cold, Our Earth has been provided with the materials essential for life that include water, a structure composed of various metals, and an atmosphere with the right balance of pressure and elements of oxygen and CO₂.

The Earth and our existence is in a delicate balance, yet a durable one.

Now, do you think it is by co-incidence or is this meant to be?

And what is our role? Are we just along for the ride –
or are we part of Spaceship Earth's crew?

And what about those with a '3rd Class' ticket in this life?

Science and Native American spirituality meet at this level of interconnectedness and it is where progressive Christianity is headed.

UCC at The Villages is already doing a lot to 'go green' – recycling newspapers, used printer-ink cartridges, and soda can pull-tops, but often these efforts are seen as the projects of a few of us instead of something in which we all claim a part.

There's more that we can do.

In their newsletter, our neighbors up the street have an article titled,

"Temple Shalom Is Going Solar" [that is to say with]

*...solar panels [to] be installed... on an inconspicuous part of the roof.
[They expect their] electric bill [will be] cut by more than half.*

*Not only will there be a big savings in the Budget,
but a solar electric system will be contributing
to a better and cleaner environment.*

Not saying we should do this – but aren't they setting a good example? Just an idea.

There is a lot yet for us to do to be good stewards – to be good crewmembers of this beautiful houseboat we call Planet Earth,
but no one of us can do it alone.

God has provided for us, God has traveled with us for a time,
and God continues to guide our way,
but we still got to make the journey.

Let me close with a song by James Taylor from an ensemble album called,
"The Prayer Cycle"...

Father, won't you carry me, for the ocean is wide.

Father, won't you carry me, for my boat is so small.

Father, on a moonless night, help me cross the stormy sea.

Out here in the darkness, help me find my way back home...

Father, won't you carry me, Father, won't you carry me,

Father, won't you carry me home...

Amen

Psalm 4:1-8 (CEV)

4:1 You are my God and protector. Please answer my prayer.

I was in terrible distress, but you set me free. Now have pity and listen as I pray.

2 How long will you people refuse to respect me?^[a]

You love foolish things, and you run after what is worthless.^[b]

3 The LORD has chosen everyone who is faithful to be his very own,^[c]
and he answers my prayers.

4 But each of you had better tremble and turn from your sins.

Silently search your heart as you lie in bed.

5 Offer the proper sacrifices and trust the LORD.

6 There are some who ask,

“Who will be good to us?”

Let your kindness, LORD, shine brightly on us.

7 You brought me more happiness than a rich harvest of grain and grapes.

8 I can lie down and sleep soundly because you, LORD, will keep me safe.

Luke 24:36b-48 (CEV)

36 While Jesus' disciples were talking about what had happened,
Jesus appeared and greeted them.

37 They were frightened and terrified
because they thought they were seeing a ghost.

38 But Jesus said,

“Why are you so frightened? Why do you doubt?

39 Look at my hands and my feet and see who I am!

Touch me and find out for yourselves.

Ghosts don't have flesh and bones as you see I have.”

40 After Jesus said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

41 The disciples were so glad and amazed
that they could not believe it.

Jesus then asked them,

“Do you have something to eat?”

42 They gave him a piece of baked fish.

43 He took it and ate it as they watched.

44 Jesus said to them,

“While I was still with you,

I told you that everything written about me

in the Law of Moses, the Books of the Prophets,

and in the Psalms[a] had to happen.”

45 Then he helped them understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them:

The Scriptures say that the Messiah must suffer,

then three days later he will rise from death.

47 They also say that all people of every nation

must be told in my name to turn to God, in order to be forgiven.

So beginning in Jerusalem,

48 you must tell everything that has happened.

Luke 24 (RSV)

[36] As they were saying this, Jesus himself stood among them.

[37] But they were startled and frightened, and supposed that they saw a spirit.

[38] And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do questionings rise in your hearts?"

[39] See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have."

[41] And while they still disbelieved for joy, and wondered, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"

[42] They gave him a piece of broiled fish,

[43] and he took it and ate before them.

[44] Then he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled."

[45] Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,

[46] and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,

[47] and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

[48] You are witnesses of these things.