

**Sermon for the Season of Creation  
The Feast of St. Francis, October 7, 2018  
Church of Reconciliation, San Antonio  
The Rev. Judith L. Rhodes**

***Because We Have Fallen in Love\****

Last Sunday, we were truly blessed by the presence of Sr. Linda Gibler, OP, as she preached a profoundly moving sermon on the truth of our identity as Light-bearers in the name of Jesus Christ! I was so moved by her words and images that I had a dream that I had become a glow-stick and lived in a village of fellow glow-sticks! Infinitely beautiful colors of the rainbow flooded the Shekinah, the shimmering light of God wherever we travelled. Now, that may have been my dream, and now that I have shared it with you, I invite you to dream your way, contemplate your way, into the nature of being the Light-bearer of Christ in the world!

Since hearing about Sr. Linda from Nancy Daniels and then calling her and meeting with her in preparation for last Sunday, I ordered from Amazon Prime of course, Linda's book, *From the Beginning to Baptism: Scientific and Sacred Stories of Water, Oil, and Fire*. It is, like Linda, herself, a stunning and powerful book full of grace and truth.

Do you remember the line from the movie, *Jerry Maguire*, "You had me from hello!" Well, she had me from the first words of her introduction...

*"The Universe is God-drenched. Every being, form, and particle of the Universe mediates and responds to God's blessing and has something to teach those who listen. Sacramentals in particular have much to tell."*

Like the Roman Catholic Church, we, Episcopalians, anchor our life of faith in sacraments and define them as "outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace." Yes, the Universe and everything that the Creator has breathed into motion is sacramental by its very nature. And we, humans, being created in the very image and likeness of the Creator, share the profound and awesome blessing of participation in the very life of the Divine.

Linda goes on to quote Paul Palmer who recounts documents and teachings of the early church, particularly those of the first through eighth centuries. Even then, from the nascent church flowed the belief that matter, all matter is good, and "that material things such water and oil, wheat and wine, are capable of acting as the instrument and vehicle of the Holy Spirit in the transformation of the human spirit."

So many of us grew up in a cultural and institutional religious context that would condemn the world, and place an untraversable divide between the things of the flesh versus the things of the spirit. We navigated so much of our early lives believing that our true home was never this one, planet Earth, but somehow, someplace called "heaven." And so, unconsciously, we, humans lived out of this dualism by taking for granted, even abusing the Earth and her resources because, well, we were destined for a far greater home in heaven.

Thank God, saints like Hildegard of Bingen, Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, theologians and scientists like Teilhard de Chardin, John Polkinghorne, Sally McFague, Brian Swimme, Mary Evelyn Tucker and many others came along and not only challenged this heretical

belief but set out to teach us about the urgency of changing our very belief system so that we would truly change how we live and move and have our very being on this sacred planet among the diverse population of Divine participants who share life with us as our beloved companions.

In her book, Linda quotes Teilhard's "Mass on the World" where he relates the experience of offering Mass without the usual sacramental of bread and wine, paten and chalice. In place of these elements, he offered the whole of creation to God for transubstantiation, that is for consecration as Christ's own Body and Blood.

*Over every living thing which is to spring up, to grow, to flower,  
to ripen during this day say again these words: This is my body.  
And over every death force which waits in readiness to corrode,  
to wither, to cut down, speak again your commanding words which  
express the supreme mystery of faith: This is my Blood. "*

Isn't that what we are called to enact at this table in the very center of our sanctuary?

Teilhard's quest to see in absolutely everything, and in absolutely everyone, the image of God, the Light of Christ must also be our prayer, as it is *our* sacred calling.

Friar Jack Winz, himself a Franciscan priest, and author of the book, *I Will See You in Heaven* (Hold up the book) Yes, that's a dog on the cover... writes: *Our God is a God of overflowing love, goodness, and beauty... When God says of any creature, whether human or nonhuman, that it is good/very good, it's not a matter of moral goodness. The creature also has an inherent goodness and beauty – a beauty that reflects God, who is ultimate Beauty."*

Richard Rohr, another powerful Franciscan voice, tells us that the official Franciscan motto is "Deus Meus et Omnia" ... "My God and all things"... saying, "Once you recognize the Christ as the universal truth of matter and spirit working together as one, then everything is holy. Once you surrender to this Christ mystery in your oh-so-ordinary self and body, you begin to see it in every other ordinary place, too. You don't have to go to sacred places for good things to happen."

I truly believe that is at the heart of our experience of the Sacred in this very sacred place we call Reconciliation. In the sanctuary that is our courtyard, we walk on holy ground. And what's more, even first time visitors to this place, feel it, too. Feel the Sacredness, feel the Divine Presence, feel the Holy ... here.

A year ago, Martha and I once more made the heart-wrenching decision to euthanize our beloved dog, Phoebe. Our vet, herself, had delivered the difficult news that Phoebe had in fact "outlived her life"... How could we force our will to have her physically with us, onto her frail and aching body? And so we surrendered her back to her loving Creator. We took six months for our hearts to heal sufficiently so we could welcome another beloved gift of the Divine into our lives. And now, Sadie, who wiggles with love and nearly levitates as we come through the door, lavishes unconditional love upon us.

Richard Rohr describes his experience of his dog, Venus, in this way:

*Venus has the most amazing ability to make eye contact with me. She*

*did it this morning. She comes to my bed at 5:30 and she puts her head on the side of my bed and looks at me. And I roll over and try to get my eyes open and look back at her. She can sustain this gaze. She just keeps looking at me. It is said that they eyes are the windows to the soul. ... Human beings can't sustain eye contact for long. We get nervous and afraid... But Venus just keeps looking at me and I wonder: What does she see? What is she thinking? What is it that she sees and likes in me? I'm convinced these beings that we thought lived at a rudimentary level of consciousness can see the one thing necessary. Love. They don't get lost in labeling and categorizing. ... At that moment of labeling, love fails.*

I am sure that those of us who have been loved unconditionally by our animal companions know exactly what Richard Rohr is conveying in this description of Venus. Love, pure Love... is embodied in these beautiful creatures of God. And our invitation is to pray to, struggle to, imperfectly witness and persevere to Love unconditionally as well.

In the conclusion of her book, Sr. Linda Gibler writes:

*Cosmic evolution is producing a deepening capacity for compassion. From atoms to life to self-reflective consciousness, Earth's ability to feel is expanding... Humans have the capacity to extend the compassion of Earth further than any other species. Only humans can love the entire planet and try to prevent harm from coming to the Beloved. Human choices will, to a large extent, determine the fate of the biosphere. Which species will survive and which ones will perish is now in our hands. A cosmocentric sacramental appreciation of Earth compels us to make choices for the benefit of the Earth community, not because it is in our best interest or only because it is the right thing to do, but **because we have fallen in love.***

And so, we who have been created by Love, must Love in response. It is the Way of Jesus we are called to follow. It is the Way of Jesus that makes such human transformation possible... to love as we have first been loved. Love without labeling. Love without categorizing. Like Venus, Phoebe, Sydney, Beta, Frank, Sadie, Stella, Lily, Lucky, Betty, Tucker and every name of our beloved animal companions... let us learn to Love without condition...

I want to leave you with the poem/prayer of John O'Donohue titled,

### **To Learn From Animal Being**

Nearer to the earth's heart,  
Deeper within its silence:  
Animals know this world  
In a way we never will.

We who are ever  
Distanced and distracted  
By the parade of bright  
Windows thought opens:

Their seamless presence  
Is not fractured thus.

Stranded between time  
Gone and time emerging,  
We manage seldom  
To be where we are:  
Whereas they are always  
Looking out from  
The here and now.

May we learn to return  
And rest in the beauty  
Of animal being,  
Learn to lean low,  
Leave our locked minds,  
And with freed senses  
Feel the earth  
Breathing with us.

May we enter  
Into lightness of spirit,  
And slip frequently into  
The feel of the wild.

Let the clear silence  
Of our animal being  
Cleanse our hearts  
Of corrosive words.

May we learn to walk  
Upon the earth  
With all confidence  
And clear-eyed stillness  
So that our minds  
Might be baptized  
In the name of the wind  
And the light  
And the rain.

My fellow Light-bearers and Lovers, so may it be.

***\*Thank you, Sr. Linda!***

