

April 21, 2024. EarthFest

Pr. Steve

Texts:

Wendell Berry, a Kentucky poet and farmer, wrote

*Our understandable wish to preserve the planet must somehow be reduced to the scale of our competence. Love is never abstract. Love does not adhere to the universe, to the planet, to the nation, to the institutions, or the professions. Love adheres to the singular sparrows of the street, to the lilies of the field, and to the least of these my brothers and sisters. Love this miraculous world that we did not make, and that is a pure gift to all of us.*

Isn't that beautiful? That's telling the truth. For all of our beautiful desires, it has to be embodied—as Jesus taught us, 'To love this miraculous world, look at the birds of the air, and the flowers of the field. ' And we go, 'What's he [Jesus] talking about?' Wendell Berry got it. It's got to be heartfelt, personal, a real connection.

That's what the EarthFest is all about. This is not just another nice day—hear about the Earth, give us a chance to immerse ourselves in transformation (which is essential)—this is no longer optional.

((How many of you remember the first Earth Day in 1970?) (You're old!))

But in all of our Scriptural traditions, this is at the core—to care for this life, and this cosmos, and this Earth that we've been given, because without it, nothing's going to happen.

The Earth is the most humble creature we'll ever meet in our lifetime (you know that?) because she allows us all of us to walk on her every day, all over her, with indifference, and uncaring, and blindness. Wow!

This is sacred work. And this is a day of transformation for all of us. The crucial thing is to experience every aspect of it. Not only the gifts of the friends who are attending, but all the surprise people will meet.

The Earth is not broken—I've got good news for you today—the Earth is not broken. We are! We'd love to blame the Earth. Wouldn't that be so much easier? No, we get a chance to restore our relationship to the Earth and each other, with reverence and respect. What a beautiful gift! And we get to do this in concert with all of our friends, that's the other profound gift— not just of this day—but this is happening in partnership with all of the Interfaith partners and friends, all of us in this together.

I will never understand how Jesus who comes as the most radically wild, open, affirming being of history for which he gets crucified—friends, that's the point—

he is crucified for welcoming everybody, including his enemies. And the Christian Church has shrunk his teachings into the most narrow-minded, exclusive power-loving religion on the planet. It's frightening. It's frightening.

And it's time to turn it around with that openness of heart again that we all need. You know, in the earliest days of the Church, the Greek theologians, Tertullian and others, spoke and wrote openly about all the people of the Greek world through whom God had already been working. *'You remember Socrates, and Heraclitus and how we'll get to talk to them in heaven, how they've sown the roots of where we're going in this faith.'* Instead, what the Church did with that, they would say, *'No. We're the ones who own Christ, and we'll distribute Christ as long as you're doing better than you certainly did yesterday. You've got to become a good person, and then we may let you in.'* It's nonsense.

We thought we were in charge of taking Christ to the world, [instead] we're in charge of meeting Christ everywhere we go. Bahá'í friends—they don't have to use the same language (why should they?)—Hindu friends, indigenous friends. The world is wide open, and the world needs all of us, living with this openness of heart and exploration. It's a challenge. Yeah, it's a challenge, and it is a profound gift, which we get to share and celebrate.

Reverend Patsy, part of the Rinde Family memorial service yesterday, turns out she and I were working at the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota in the 1970s. We never met each other there—but we did yesterday. (Now do you believe there's a God?) And she mentioned this great phrase used throughout indigenous culture, *'All my relatives'*.

That's it down deep. Not only the humanoids, [but] the creatures, the fruit-bearing trees, the waters, the seas, all my relatives upon whom my life depends— *all our relatives* being loved into being, and harmony, and forgiveness, and mercy, so we may share an abundant life together. Amen.

The peace which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.