

“For the Beauty of the Earth”**Scripture****Romans 8:19-21 (NRSV)**

¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Scripture**Psalms 104:1-35 (NRSV)**

¹Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, you are very great. You are clothed with honor and majesty, ²wrapped in light as with a garment. You stretch out the heavens like a tent, ³you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind, ⁴you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers. ⁵You set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken. ⁶You cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. ⁷At your rebuke they flee; at the sound of your thunder they take to flight. ⁸They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys to the place that you appointed for them. ⁹You set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth.

¹⁰You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, ¹¹giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst. ¹²By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches. ¹³From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work. ¹⁴You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, ¹⁵and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart. ¹⁶The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. ¹⁷In them the birds build their nests; the stork has its home in the fir trees. ¹⁸The high mountains are for the wild goats; the rocks are a refuge for the conies.

¹⁹You have made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting. ²⁰You make darkness, and it is night, when all the animals of the forest come creeping out. ²¹The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God. ²²When the sun rises, they withdraw and lie down in their dens. ²³People go out to their work and to their labor until the evening. ²⁴O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. ²⁵Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. ²⁶There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it. ²⁷These all look to you to give them their food in due season; ²⁸when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. ²⁹When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away

their breath, they die and return to their dust. ³⁰When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.

³¹May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works— ³²who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke. ³³I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. ³⁴May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord. ³⁵Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord!

Scripture

Matthew 5:5 (NRSV)

Blessed are the meek, they will inherit the earth.

Scripture

Romans 8:19-21 (The Message)

¹⁹The created world itself can hardly wait for what's coming next. ²⁰Everything in creation is being more or less held back. God reins it in ²¹until both creation and all the creatures are ready and can be released at the same moment into the glorious times ahead. Meanwhile, the joyful anticipation deepens.

Scripture

Psalms 104:1-35 (The Message)

¹O my soul, bless God! God, my God, how great you are! beautifully, gloriously robed, ²Dressed up in sunshine, and all heaven stretched out for your tent. ³You built your palace on the ocean deeps, made a chariot out of clouds and took off on wind-wings. ⁴You commandeered winds as messengers, appointed fire and flame as ambassadors. ⁵You set earth on a firm foundation so that nothing can shake it, ever. ⁶You blanketed earth with ocean, covered the mountains with deep waters; ⁷Then you roared and the water ran away - your thunder crash put it to flight. ⁸Mountains pushed up, valleys spread out in the places you assigned them. ⁹You set boundaries between earth and sea; never again will earth be flooded. ¹⁰You started the springs and rivers, sent them flowing among the hills. ¹¹All the wild animals now drink their fill, wild donkeys quench their thirst. ¹²Along the riverbanks the birds build nests, ravens make their voices heard. ¹³You water the mountains from your heavenly cisterns; earth is supplied with plenty of water.

¹⁴You make grass grow for the livestock, hay for the animals that plow the ground. Oh yes, God brings grain from the land, ¹⁵wine to make people happy, Their faces glowing with health, a people well-fed and hearty. ¹⁶God's trees are well-watered - the Lebanon cedars he planted. ¹⁷Birds build their nests in those trees; look - the stork at home in the treetop. ¹⁸Mountain goats climb about the cliffs; badgers burrow among the rocks.

¹⁹The moon keeps track of the seasons, the sun is in charge of each day. ²⁰When it's dark and night takes over, all the forest creatures come out. ²¹The young lions roar for their prey, clamoring to God for their supper. ²²When the sun

comes up, they vanish, lazily stretched out in their dens. ²³Meanwhile, men and women go out to work, busy at their jobs until evening. ²⁴What a wildly wonderful world, God! You made it all, with Wisdom at your side, made earth overflow with your wonderful creations. ²⁵Oh, look - the deep, wide sea, brimming with fish past counting, sardines and sharks and salmon. ²⁶Ships plow those waters, and Leviathan, your pet dragon, romps in them. ²⁷All the creatures look expectantly to you to give them their meals on time. ²⁸You come, and they gather around; you open your hand and they eat from it. ²⁹If you turned your back, they'd die in a minute - Take back your Spirit and they die, revert to original mud; ³⁰Send out your Spirit and they spring to life - the whole countryside in bloom and blossom. ³¹The glory of God - let it last forever! Let God enjoy his creation! ³²He takes one look at earth and triggers an earthquake, points a finger at the mountains, and volcanoes erupt. ³³Oh, let me sing to God all my life long, sing hymns to my God as long as I live! ³⁴Oh, let my song please him; I'm so pleased to be singing to God. ³⁵But clear the ground of sinners - no more godless men and women! O my soul, bless God!

Scripture

Matthew 5:5 (NRSV)

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

If you've missed some of the homecoming services this past week, you've missed some wonderful opportunities for personal, spiritual renewal. I've been enjoying having a seat in the pews for the services and have gained a great sense of encouragement and blessing myself through it all. I've learned some things, as well.

In particular, I enjoyed what Rev. Ruth Hamilton shared about Jesus' Beatitudes on Wednesday evening. She strung the eight blessings together as if they were steps in a spiritual recovery program. Starting with an admission of spiritual poverty, she took us to the next step of receiving unsolicited and maybe unwelcome sympathy for the losses we mourn and from there onward. So she described the blessing of meekness as the beginning of recovery stepping out of a particular grief.

I understood that well. It's the morning after, right? (There's got to be a morning after!) After absorbing the blow of a loss and the comfort that promises a tomorrow and may seem only a promise which might come tomorrow, there are those first steps of recovery. When I've had a bad day, it's the morning which invites those meek steps of walking on my own again, when it happens. I have to go outside. I have to step out of my house and into the world for that recovery to begin to be realized.

So Ruth talked further about walking anew with a hunger and thirst for righteousness, then gaining a purity of heart, a spiritual maturity, so that one could have the strength to become a peacemaker – whose prize often is a cross, as it was for the Prince of Peace. I loved her eight step program.

But what Ruth didn't talk about (although perhaps she could have if she had more time), was the prize. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." No wonder I have to walk out of my front door to begin the morning after. In the meekness of those first new steps, there is an invite into the earth which is the prize.

Later this week, we're having the first of a series of Thursday night dinners. The meals will start at 6 pm, and by 6:30 or so we will have some helpful, thoughtful speakers to bring Jesus' Beatitudes home to us in very practical ways. Destry Jarvis will start us out this week and his topic is "Saving our children from Nature-Deficit Disorder." That's actually the nifty subtitle of a wonderful book by Richard Louv called *Last Child in the Woods*. Louv's a reporter for the *San Diego Union/Tribune* newspaper, which I grew up reading as a teenager. His columns for the paper were meditations on what it means to live in neighborhoods, in our particular community. He'd talk about kids playing basketball in their cul de sac, with a bench set up next to the portable hoop. It was called the "Dad's Bench," because it became the place where the dads of the neighborhood would sit when their high school daughters were getting ready to go out on a date. The dads would sit there so that they could have a talk with the boy who would be taking their daughter out for the evening.

Louv went on from these columns to write some very helpful books on family life, one a large research project called *Childhood's Future*, in which he delved into the most recent of stresses on family life, struggling working parents, distracted and/or over-programmed, over/stimulated kids, with all of the pressure on to achieve today because of anxiety about tomorrow. In interviewing 3000 families, he gained numerous insights into the dynamics of today's family culture.

And that's when one of his own children said something that caught him by surprise. Matthew, who was ten at the time, "looked at me from across a restaurant table," Louv said, "and said quite seriously, 'Dad, how come it was more fun when you were a kid?'" "What do you mean?" Louv replied. "Well, you're always talking about

your woods and tree houses, and how you used to ride that horse down near the swamp.” And then it struck Richard Louv, the changes that have come as generations have come and gone over the last few decades. Ours is a country which has gone from a Davy Crockett generation where people lived daily on the land, in nature to a generation where Davy Crockett was admired as a hero at our Disney World vacation and we visited nature at National Parks and on vacation, to a generation where the better choice is to stay inside because that’s where the electrical plugs are. So, how can we know the blessing of being meek, if we cannot open our front doors and step into our inheritance?

In Psalm 104, God is blessed as the one who created the heavens, the seas, the land and all of the living creatures which play and hide and live in the abundance of the earth. In Romans 8 we see the creation injured and laboring towards a new liberty, awaiting the redemption of its stewards, the children of God. Climate crises mount in our day, toxins claim living victims because our earth is a resource to be exploited rather than a gift to be honored and cherished. But here’s a blessing: that a quality of meekness invites us to step out our front doors and join with all creation in blessing God’s goodness. I wonder what could change for us, if we started a new way of living in this world, with beholding the beauty of the earth. It’s all around us. It’s right there. It’s even in the call we have to remember Jesus’ death and resurrection: the Bread of life, the Wine of Communion. On this World Communion Sunday, let us lift us the beautiful gifts of the earth and breathe in the blessing of Jesus the Christ, who calls us to a new meekness so that we live into the inheritance of the earth. Amen.