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Westminster Presbyterian Church
Buffalo, New York
September 8, 2019 - Rally Day

**“Whose We Are”
Luke 12:48**

Look around:

Who do you see?

Women and men,
boys and girls;
people who come small, medium and large;
Left-handed, right-handed;
Football focused, hockey hooked, baseball besotted;
Readers, binge watchers;
Texters, talkers;
Runners, golfers;
Dog lovers, cat fanciers;
Pizza fanatics, wing-chasers.

We are teachers, accountants,
lawyers, physicians,
researchers, technicians;
homemakers, caregivers;
parents, children,
brothers, sisters,
grandparents, grandchildren.

We are Presbyterians,
many of us former Baptists, Methodists,
Lutherans, Episcopalians,
Roman Catholics.

We are Buffalonians,
New Yorkers,
Americans;
with our roots spread across the globe:
our ancestors hailing from England, Germany,
Poland, Italy,
Ghana, Cameroon,
China, Japan.

We are such a wonderful array of God’s children,
such a magnificent rainbow,
sparkling in all our diversity,
a rich mix that delights God;
every one of us a child of God,
every one of us created in God’s image,
every one of us loved by God.

We are a wonderful array

and we see ourselves, define ourselves in countless ways,
 each of us a unique child of God,
 with unique gifts given us by the Holy Spirit.

And yet, however we see ourselves,
 however we define ourselves,
 who we are -
 who we really are -
 are disciples of Jesus Christ,
 every one of us a follower of the Son of God.
 We answer the question of “who we are”,
 by remembering “whose we are”.

And once we remember “whose we are”
 and let that thought take precedence
 over “who we are”.
 all the rest of life falls into place
 in truly amazing ways.

Once we remember whose we are,
 we have a foundation on which we can build,
 truly build,
 an abundant life,
 a life rich in grace and love,
 as we follow our Lord Jesus Christ.

The trouble is, of course,
 it is too easy to define ourselves
 in any of a hundred different ways,
 throwing our discipleship into the mix here and there,
 usually in second, third, fourth place,
 behind other ways we prefer to see ourselves.

On Monday we find it easier to define ourselves
 by the vocation we pursue, or the school we attend;
 on Tuesday, by the social group we’re part of;
 on Wednesday by the neighborhood we live in;
 on Thursday by our political leanings;
 on Friday, of course, the sports teams we root for.

But what Jesus wants from us
 is for us to stand and declare
 that we are his followers first
 and we are his followers last,
 beginning to end, Alpha to Omega.
 Disciple of Christ first,
 everything else following from there.

This is path we are hesitant to take, though,
 because we know Jesus does not call us
 to a life of comfort and ease,
 a life always prosperous,
 without cares, challenges, problems.
 On the contrary, Jesus tells us very clearly
 that we are to take up our crosses,
 and be prepared even to lose our lives for our faith.

This life Jesus calls us to
 may often be at odds with the mainstream,
 with the accepted way of thinking,
 with the “ways of the world,”
 and with our own comfort level.

Jesus calls us to heal the sick when no one else will;
 to feed the hungry
 and comfort the lonely and the afflicted
 when we’d really rather be doing something else.

Jesus calls us to welcome the stranger, the alien,
 the foreigner, the immigrant,
 when everyone else is closing doors,
 and building walls.

Jesus calls us to work for peace and reconciliation;
 work,
 and never be content with just thoughts and prayers.

Jesus tells us that we are not simply
 to bemoan the existence of injustice,
 we are to root out every cause,
 and create a more just, more equitable world.

Each of us as a disciple of Christ
 is called to a life of hard work.
 And it is a life of responsibility, great responsibility,
 as Jesus taught us in our Gospel lesson:
*“From everyone to whom much has been given,
 much will be required;
 and from one to whom much has been entrusted,
 even more will be demanded.”*
 (Luke 12:48)

These responsibilities include not only
 looking after one another,

we are also to look after and care for God's creation,
 this world God called "good, very good",
 this world which delights God with its beauty and majesty;
 This world which so wonderfully reflects God's love
 that, "*that the morning stars sang together
 and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy!*"
 (Job 38)

Now, search through the Gospels
 and you won't find Jesus speaking directly
 to our call as his disciples to pick up trash,
 or stop dumping sewage in rivers and lakes,
 or poisoning the air with what comes out of our cars.

Rather, our call to creation care is bound up
 in Jesus two great Commandments.
 You remember them:
 we are to love God with all our heart & mind,
 soul & strength;
 and we are to love our neighbor as ourselves.

If we love God,
 then we should love all that God has created,
 all that God calls good,
 all that delights God.

If we foul the air that God created,
 filling it with hydrocarbons and other pollutants
 from our cars, trucks, factories;
 if we kill off trees and wildlife;
 if we use lakes, rivers, and oceans use as sewers
 how is that loving God?
 Loving what God loves?
 To argue that it is just business is faithless;
 To argue that we're creating jobs is faithless.

And if we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves,
 then it is faithless of us
 to foul our neighbors' air,
 to pollute our neighbors' water.
 It really is that simple.
 Part of the black sooty smoke pouring out of the stack
 of a diesel truck bringing us our Amazon.com packages
 winds up in the lungs of the children
 walking along the sidewalk on their way to school.

When God spoke through the prophet Amos,

telling us to *“Let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream*

(Amos 5:24)

we assume that God had in mind clean waters,
and that the ever-flowing stream
was not clogged with waste, sewage, garbage.

More than 25 years ago,
a friend took me on his boat down the Buffalo River
to see the vestiges of Buffalo’s glory days
as a grain-milling center.

What I remember all these years later,
was how filthy the water was,
brown, sludgy, oil-stained,
a rank smell assaulting my nose,
nothing green, no sign of life.

How delighted I was, then,
when I boated down the same stretch of river last summer
and found the river so much cleaner, the banks green,
signs of life everywhere.

It was good, very good.

It was easy to imagine God smiling,
pleased that we had cleaned up
what we had once poisoned.

God’s hope for us,
as God says through the prophet Isaiah, is that
*“no infant [should] die of illness,
nor an older person fail to live a long and healthy life.”*
(Isaiah 65:20)

And yet, how many children die,
how many older people find their lives cut short
from cancer and other illnesses
caused by pollution in the air,
the water, even the food we eat.

Speaking at Chautauqua a few years back,
the Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor observed that
we humans are not made of
*“of any more special stuff
than the rest of creation”*;
She went on in her talk to remind us
that we’d be wrong to think that we’ve been called
to a dominion of power,
even a dominion of despoiling
when our Lord has called us to a

“Dominion of Love”.

Caring for God’s creation begins with awareness,
 awareness of what we are doing to God’s creation.
 We are to open our eyes and our minds
 and acknowledge the impact our actions
 have on God’s creation,
 and how our actions affect all our neighbors,
 all God’s children,
 especially on those who live down-wind, down-stream.

Those who deny the existence of the problem
 are like the priest and the Levite
 who walked by the injured Samaritan
 pretending not to see him.
 As the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning once wrote:
 “Earth’s crammed with heaven
 And every common bush afire with God’
 But only he who sees, takes off his shoes...”
 (from “Aurora Leigh”)

Wherever we stand,
 we stand on holy ground,
 for we stand on the Lord’s ground,
 ground we are called to care for,
 out of our love for our neighbor
 and out of our love for God.

*“From one to whom much has been entrusted,
 even more will be demanded.”*
*“For the earth is the LORD’s and all that is in it,
 the world, and those who live in it.
 ...May the Lord rejoice in his works”.*
 (Psalms 24:1-2; 104:31)

This is the Word of the Lord.
 Thanks be to God.

AMEN

“I would feel more optimistic about a bright future for man

if he spent less time proving that he can outwit Nature
and more time tasting her sweetness
and respecting her seniority.”

EB White, Essays

³ *“All things are lawful,”*

but not all things are beneficial.

“All things are lawful,” but not all things build up.

²⁴ *Do not seek your own advantage,*

but that of the other.

1 Corinthians 10:23-24