

Sermon preached at St. John's Episcopal Church, West Hartford, CT

The Reverend William J. Eakins

May 26, 2019

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

[Acts 16:9-15](#)

[Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5](#)

[John 14:23-29](#)

[Psalm 67](#)

I have not been in this pulpit since last year! My wife and I just returned from a world cruise that began in San Francisco last January and ended in London last week. Our trip around the world was a wonderful journey that opened our eyes and our hearts to the beauty of the earth and the diversity of its peoples, and it was an experience that greatly enriched our understanding of what it means to be citizens of the world.

Our experience reminded us of that new perspective of planet earth that we were given 60 years ago when astronauts sent back the first pictures of earth as seen from space. We were awed to see "this fragile earth, our island home," turning like a bright blue and green jewel against a vast velvet darkness.

This was a completely different image of our planet from the one on globes and maps. Look at a globe or a map of the world and you would think the Earth is divided like a patchwork quilt of tan, pink, green, yellow, and lavender shapes floating on a blue sea. Look at the Earth from space, and what you see is green for the land and blue for the sea. You don't see national borders; you don't see different countries. This perspective of the Earth can change our thinking about ourselves and the world, about what matters and what does not.

Astronaut Russell Schweikart recalls the profound change that occurred in him as he saw the earth circle beneath him. Although at first he identified himself with that portion of the globe he called home, the United States, it was not long before that identity began to shift. Schweikart writes:

*When you circle the earth every hour and a half, you begin to recognize that your identity is with the whole thing, and that makes a change. You look down there and you can't imagine how many borders and boundaries you cross again and again, and you don't even see them. There you are, hundreds of people in the Mid-East killing each other over some imaginary line that you're not even aware of, that you can't see. And from where you see it, the thing is a whole, and it's so beautiful. You wish you could ... say "Look, look at it from this perspective. Look at that! What's important?"*

"The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." Might these prophetic words from Revelation come to fruition in our generation? To us has been granted the possibility of seeing the planet whole, as simply the good green Earth. That vision has the power to heal the selfish and unimportant divisions that set nation against nation and to replace those divisions with a common purpose to work for the betterment of all people everywhere. Essential to the realization of such healing is understanding that inescapably we share a common life on this planet. Earth is the only place we human beings have got, and we had better start learning how to get along with one another and how to take care of this planet for the generations to come. There is a particular urgency that we do so, since the same technological advances that have made it possible for us to see Earth from space also make it possible for us to destroy not only civilization as we know it but the planet itself.

The challenge before the human race is for us to grow up so that our social maturity catches up with our technology. Children of all ages need to discover that they are not the center of the universe, that the world does not revolve around them and their desires and needs. They have to find their place in a big world, to learn how to get along with other people of different types and backgrounds who have their own needs and desires. The trouble with us, however, is that what most of us manage to learn on an individual level we fail to learn on a higher level. We think of our tribe our clan, our nation, our religion as the best and look down on all the others. We become arrogant and act as if we're the only people who matter. We become too big for our britches.

What we desperately need is something like that potion that Alice drinks in *Alice in Wonderland*. You know what I mean: that liquid in the vial with the label reading, "Drink me." When Alice has grown monstrously big, all out of proportion to everything around her, she has to drink some of that potion in order to shrink down and regain the right size. When human beings, whether as individuals or nations, get too big an idea of their importance, their place in the world, we need something like Alice's potion to shrink us down to size. That something, I

would argue, is the dose of reality that is the vision of “this fragile earth our island home.” Could it be the vision that God has given to our generation to call us to our senses, to restore us and heal us?

One way of thinking about global warming is that it is a great opportunity to respond positively to our common lot as inhabitants of the planet. Earth is getting warmer, glaciers and polar ice caps are melting, sea levels are rising, and I believe the evidence that we human beings are responsible. The Maldives may disappear under the Indian Ocean in eighty years. Only if we as citizens of planet Earth act now by changing our way of living can we avert serious consequences for those who come after us. The question is “Will we?”

It is troubling that we seem to be going through a period of resistance to and retreat from the idea of global unity and global responsibility. What Brexit, America First, and Islamic extremism have in common is putting a premium on special interests while withdrawing from global engagement and cooperation.

At such a time as this, Christians must uphold God’s vision of a different world, the healing of all divisions between nations, people living in peace and harmony all over planet earth. Our vision is rooted in the Bible’s story of how God made the Earth and all living things and called it good. God loved the world that God had made so much that when we human beings had messed things up and fallen out with one another, God sent us Jesus to teach us how we ought to live and to make peace on earth. The Jesus way of peace is the way of love.

I imagine that when many of us were children, we learned this little song:

*Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world.*

*Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight*

*Jesus loves the little children of the world.*

That song rang in my memory as I travelled around the world on our ship these past five months. There they were everywhere we went: God’s children of all ages with many different faces, wearing many different kinds of clothes and eating different foods, living in shacks, bungalows, and high-rise buildings, worshipping in temples, mosques, churches, and shrines, every one of them someone precious in God’s sight.

Isn’t such a vision what guides and inspires what we do as the people of God? Isn’t that why the apostle Paul responded as he did to a cry for help from Macedonia? Isn’t that why we pray for the leaders of our country and of other nations on earth that there may be justice and peace? Isn’t that why here at St. John’s we have a community garden to raise food for our neighbors, why we helped support a school in Haiti, a parish in Cuba, and why we support Grace Academy and Covenant Prep, Loaves and Fishes, Habitat for Humanity and a refugee ministry here in Hartford?

We love our country and our hearts beat with patriot pride on this Memorial Day weekend. We give thanks for veterans and those who gave their lives for the greater good of defending America. We also know that our loyalty and our responsibility is to a wider family, the human family, our brothers and sisters who live all over planet Earth. In that wider loyalty lies our hope – and God’s hope – for the future.