

Discovering good things in God's world

May 30, 2010 – Rev. Jim Cullen

It was not too long ago, during the U.S. election campaign, we heard Sarah Palin lead her followers in chanting, “Drill, baby, Drill”. It was call to expand the oil drilling operations in US costal waters. Today the slogan has been replaced with the words “Kill, baby, Kill”, as the oil continued to gush from the ocean floor contaminating and polluting beaches and wet lands around the gulf coast. All the while, BP petroleum is trying to figure out a way to stop the flow. It is as if no one ever thought this kind of thing could ever happen. Every day some new approach is taken and fails. It has become the worst oil spill in US history.

Then there is the volcano in Iceland. The ash from it rises and floats over much of Europe and to a lesser degree over eastern Canada. Thousands of flights have been cancelled. Just as it seems to be settling down a fresh plume of ash darkens the skies.

There are some people interpreting this as an act of God to punish the ways of people on earth. I would not go there. However, there are two lessons to be learned. From the volcano experience we are reminded that this earth has a life of its own. There are activities that we cannot control; activities that are part of the way the earth operates. We ought to be humbled by this.

The oil disaster is a reminder that humans have always claimed the earth for our use and so often that turns into abuse. My understanding is that there are ways to drill on the ocean floor, putting in safeguards that should control such a disaster. It seems that BP oil did not do that and governments did not insist on it.

These examples ought to make us think about our relationship to God's world. Of course, if we think it is our, then perhaps that is the problem.

We look at these problems and interpret them in our own way. We see what is wrong and assume that the fault lies elsewhere. Perhaps it has a lot to do with how we view circumstances.

There is a story about a young couple who move into a new neighborhood. The next morning while they are eating breakfast, the young woman sees her neighbor hanging the wash outside. “That laundry is not very clean”, she said. “She doesn't know how to wash correctly. Perhaps she needs better laundry soap.” Her husband looks on, but remained silent. Every time her neighbor would hang her wash to dry, the young woman would make the same comments. About one month later, the woman was surprised to see a nice clean wash on the line and said to her husband, “Look, she has learned how to wash correctly. I wonder who taught her this.” The husband said, “I got up early this morning and cleaned **our** windows.” And so it is, what we see depends on the windows through which we look.

This morning we sang about “All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small.” We could change the words slightly, All things bright and beautiful, and things great and small, The Lord God makes them all.”

At least once a year, I believe that it is good for us to focus on all the good there is in God's world – all the good that enriches our lives. Before we can see the good and the gracious gifts of God we need to clean our own windows. God has blest us with the beauty of nature, natural resources, food for our table, wine for our glass (if that is our taste), beaches to enjoy, water and hill top views, sunrise and sun set, growing gardens, faithful pets, birds for their sounds, other birds for our food, animals domestic and wild – all this put together seems to come alive in spring time.

Good things are found in the lives of other people. We learn from each other. We find satisfaction in sharing our journey with others, sharing what works for us and what does not. We celebrate what works. We learn from our mistakes. We are challenged as we meet people from other cultures, other lifestyles, other values and other religious paths. We can discover much that is good and beautiful in the lives of both friends and strangers.

And then we have the insight that comes from the first lesson this morning. The writer (probably Paul) writes about the difficulties in life, indicating that good can rise out of difficulties. *And we boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts...*”

In the midst of all that seems to be wrong it may be a stretch to go from suffering to hope. It can seem to be impossible. Yet, it does happen. But as the writer indicates there are often steps that happen in between.

Some never take the steps and continue to look at life through their dirty windows. Others see God's grace unfolding and move from difficulty to hope.

Sometimes the necessary step is forgiveness – sometimes it is letting go of what we no longer hold.

We can bring these thoughts together as we listen to the words, written in 1864 and included in our hymn book. I like to hear them sung to John Rutter's arrangement especially by the Cambridge Singers.

*For the beauty of the earth,
For the beauty of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies:
For the beauty of each hour,
Of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale, and tree and flower,
Sun, and moon and stars of light:
For the joy of human love,
Brother, sister, parent, child,
Friends on earth and friends above,
For all gentle thought and mild:
For each perfect gift of thine
To our race so freely given,
Graces human and divine,
Flowers of earth and buds of heaven.*

*Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our joyful hymn on praise.(*

(F.S. Pierpoint, 1835-1917, slightly altered)

May we go out and discover something beautiful in God's world today. Amen