

(Homily delivered by Pam Hyde at St. Andrews in Nogales on October 17, 2010)

*God, you have made our world and seen that it is good:
grant to us, created to complete your work,
the bright, delightful vision that makes us care for what we do. **Amen***

Good morning! I'm Pam Hyde -- Polly and Alan Hyde's daughter. This past April I gave the homily on Earth Day Sunday at my home church, Church of the Epiphany in Flagstaff, and Rev. Lucie has been kind enough to ask me to come to St. Andrews during your creation season and deliver my remarks again. I come to you today not as a theologian or as one ordained to ministry – I am neither – but as a Christian, as someone who has spent most of her career in conservation, and as someone in relationship with God...and with God's creation. And I have but one burning question for you today....

What is your relationship to God's creation?

This year we celebrated the 40th anniversary of the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970. I can't help but think of the biblical use of the number forty to express the notion of "a long time" – you know, God made it rain for forty days and forty nights while Noah and the animals were cooped up on the ark, Moses spent forty days and forty nights up on Mt. Sinai with God getting the Ten Commandments, and when the Israelites were wicked God made them wander around in the wilderness for forty years. Forty years – a long time. Well? *Has* it been a long time since we first set aside a day

to honor the earth, a day where we pledged to do a better job of taking care of this fragile earth, our island home? And have we made any progress in those ideals expressed forty years ago?

The answer is yes. And no. I could spend hours detailing what has been accomplished and what has not. But what is ultimately more enlightening is to look at how you and I have changed. Or not changed. So again, I ask you,

What is your relationship to God's creation?

Let's take this apart and examine it in two pieces. Let's take a look first at God's creation.

What is God's creation? The book of Genesis lays it out for us pretty clearly. We've all heard or read the creation story... God creating light, separating it from darkness, creating heaven, separating water from dry land, creating the sun and moon, creating plants, animals, birds, fishes...and man. Every rock, every atom, every drop of water, every stinging insect, every sunny day, every tornado, every tropical beach – is part of God's creation. But do we really understand how masterful this creation is? How perfectly everything was made? How perfectly everything fits together? We are the most intelligent species on the earth – made in God's image – but we could not begin to create what God has created. Earlier this year I heard an interview on the radio with William

McDonough, a pioneer of green architecture, and I was struck by something he said. He said,

“If we look at a tree and think of it as a design assignment, it would be like asking you to make something that makes oxygen, sequesters carbon, fixes nitrogen, distills water, provides habitat for hundreds of species, accrues solar energy as fuel, makes complex sugars and food, changes colors with the seasons, creates micro-climates, and self replicates.”

Wow. I bet you'll never look at a tree the same way again.

Now contemplate something like the Amazon River. Or a hummingbird. Or a virus. Or the human body.

I don't know about you, but when I think about God's creation in these terms, there is only one word that comes to mind.

Awe.

I am in awe of God's creation.

But clearly not everyone feels that way. I think a lot of us kind of take it for granted. It's around us all the time. It just is what it is. It can even be annoying sometimes – I'll tell you, when a red ant bit my toe in Grand Canyon several years ago just as I was about to jump in my boat and run a big rapid, I wasn't too thrilled with God's creation! But mostly we just

ignore God's creation. Yeah it's cool, yeah, maybe it's in trouble, but we have more pressing things to deal with.

So, I ask you again,

What is your relationship to God's creation?

If we look at the "relationship" part of this question, we might wonder... what *should* our relationship to God's creation be? What should it look like? Well, we may not have really noticed before, but we have been given clues. I think the most straightforward clues are in the Book of Common Prayer. How about when we say Form IV of the Prayers of the People, and we say,

"Give us a reverence for the earth as your own creation, that we may use its resources rightly in the service of others and to your honor and glory."

A *reverence* for the earth. "Reverence" is a pretty powerful word. What we are praying for there is a feeling of profound awe, respect and love for God's own creation. We are asking for those feelings that can guide us to use the earth's resources rightly, and in service to one another and to God. We are praying that our treatment of creation is always such that it brings honor and glory to God.

Consider also what the priest says at the altar in Eucharistic Prayer D:

“You formed us in your own image, giving the whole world into our care, so that, in obedience to you, Our Creator, we might rule and serve all your creatures.”

Is this true? Has God given the whole world into our care? What a huge responsibility! And how are we to go about fulfilling that responsibility? We are to rule and serve all God’s creatures.

What does THAT mean? How do we both rule and serve?

The first thing to remember is that God’s creation is not ours to do with what we will. We have been entrusted with its care. To that end we make decisions for creation, but it is imperative that those decisions serve the best interests of creation. God has, in essence, made man the trustee of his creation. We serve in that capacity at God’s pleasure, and we **MUST** take our responsibility seriously.

But we must not forget that we are also a *part* of God’s creation. We are not separate from creation, but because God formed us in his own image, he has chosen us to be the stewards of our brethren in creation.

As I ponder this relationship, I can’t help but make what may be a theological leap. When Jesus ate his final supper with the disciples, he gave them a new commandment: “Love one another as I have loved you.”

This is widely understood as a commandment to love our fellow man with the unconditional love of Christ. But if we know that mankind is a part of God's creation, and we know God loves all of his creation, then I ask you this: are we not also commanded to love all of God's creation with the same unconditional love that *God has* for all that he has created? I don't know the answer to that, but in my heart it seems right.

And even if we read Jesus' new commandment in its traditional meaning, to love our fellow man, doesn't this require us to preserve God's creation for the benefit of mankind? How can I say I love my neighbor as Jesus loves me if I pollute my neighbor's water or air? If driving a gas-guzzler emits greenhouse gases that contribute to global climate change, which in turn causes an increase in sea level that floods out entire inhabitants of small Pacific islands, how can I drive a gas-guzzler and say that I love my neighbor? If I do things that leave the earth a worse place for the generations that come after me, how have I demonstrated Christ-like love? I must be aware of the impacts of my choices, my decisions, my actions upon others, and upon creation.

So,

What is your relationship to God's creation?

If you have a reverence for the earth as God's own creation, and you take your responsibility as a trustee of God's creation seriously, what does that

call you to do? I have pondered this question over and over in my mind and my heart. I think it is clear that it calls one to “do no harm.” To tread lightly. To take no more than you need. But perhaps we can recognize an even more significant, yet intangible, imperative.

With my husband Doug I experience the kind of love that makes me want more for him than I want for myself. I know that many of you who have found this kind of love know what I mean. Doug's happiness means more to me than my own happiness does. I think that when God gave the whole world into our care, he wanted us to love it in this kind of selfless, serving way. The way that a man or woman loves his or her mate, the way that a parent loves a child. The way that God loves us. We are called to *love* creation, and protect and nurture it in the best ways we know how.

Thinking about today's epistle, I wonder if there isn't *even one more* imperative there for us. Paul exhorts Timothy to “proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.” “Do the work of an evangelist,” he says, “carry out your ministry fully.” If we are stewards of God's creation, perhaps a part of proclaiming the Good Word is proclaiming the holiness of all that God has created. In a world where the destruction of creation is occurring all around us, are we not called to speak up on behalf of creation? If we do not turn a blind eye to the destruction that we see, how can we stay mute? Paul warns Timothy of a time when people will “accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their

own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.” We have all, at some time, succumbed to the seduction of believing those who tell us what we want to hear. God tells us that his creation is good and holy; men and governments tell us that sometimes environmental destruction is necessary in the pursuit of progress and economic prosperity. God *entrusts* us with his creation, but we have not questioned others who tell us that creation is ours to do with what we will. If we are called to love, protect and nurture creation, we must defend it. As stewards, we must be – as Paul said – evangelists for our brethren in creation, and we must carry out this ministry fully.

God’s creation is holy. And we are part of it. Is it acceptable to destroy it? No. Is it acceptable to ignore it? I don’t think so. I think we are called to act *deliberately* as trustees of God’s creation – to make wise decisions moment by moment, day by day, year by year on behalf of creation. Let us find that reverence for creation, and instill it in all that we undertake in our lives.

So I ask you to consider,

What is your relationship to God’s creation?

AMEN.

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