

## ***“Start Where We Are”***

Rev. David Gregory

September 8, 2019

13th Sunday after Pentecost



### **First Reading**

Genesis 1:9, *New Revised Standard Version*

God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so.

### **Second Reading**

from *The Four Elements* by John O’Donohue

Why is the landscape hardly noticed? Why is it so rarely considered a presence? Why is it abused, raided and raped? The answer has to do with the powerful motor of greed and blindness in the human. Naive and arrogant “human come lately” believes that he actually owns the landscape. The ferocity and hunger of this desire to own landscape is probably a subconscious act of vengeance by the exiled human orphan who senses in his depths that impenetrable landscape will one day absorb his abandoned bones. Another reason is that landscape is a shy presence. Having existed so long and so elegantly without the human intruder, it wishes to keep back from us .... It leaves us to our preoccupations, our constructed meanings, desires and lives. A clue to the independence and poise of landscape is its stillness and silence.

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This is a day of new beginnings, a “regathering” of our community as we begin a new program year, looking ahead at the gifts we will gather and share over these next several months. I am really grateful for the ministry of Elaine Reichert who led our service last Sunday, and for Patty Sempell who stepped in as pianist. It is good to make new friends and to hear different voices. We need them from time to time. Eating the same meal over and over is never a healthy thing to do, and so we appreciate the nutrients that come through different voices.

New friends were made as well at Family Camp, and as a number of us gathered at River’s Bend, we incorporated the same readings that Elaine chose for us, as an expression of the fact that wherever and whenever we gather, whether it’s a Sunday morning service, or a monthly Taize gathering, a Monday healing circle, or Wednesday yoga; whether it is a gathering of Wisdom Seekers or Stone Soup, a drumming circle, a waterfall hike or howling at the full moon—the list goes on and on—Community Congregational Church is a collection of seedlings which we are tending and watering.

My encouragement to you is to find your particular place in this garden, locate the plants that you are passionate about, and tend them with all the love and compassion you can muster; then look toward the bountiful harvest that we will enjoy together. This is an ancient metaphor, as we consider the words of Paul who said, “One person plants and another person waters, and God gives the increase.”

As a community we are growing in all kinds of ways, some more visible than others. At the beginning of this new season, what I’d like to see us do is make our 10:00 service a celebration of as many of those other expressions that you might not see, because they might come from a different part of the garden from the one you are tending. In other words, we might offer healing prayers or incorporate a little drumming; we might do some meditation, or some yoga breathing along with a Taize piece; or we might just hang around the welcome table and get to know someone new.

It is very fitting that we begin with the soil of this garden today—that we prepare it, till it, feed it, and care for the seedlings—all the signs of new life in our community. The soil (or the earth), you see, is an expression of our identity. It is the place we begin. It is our genesis, the womb from which we have come. For centuries in our particular family of faith, we lost our sense of beginning, where we have come from, and also where we are going. From the fourth century onward, the expulsion of all feminine expressions of God left us not only lopsided, but also adrift. Not surprisingly, Christianity has often been a motherless child, frightened and insecure, and in its fear has created systematic theologies, or artificial power structures to replace what is already here, but rejected.

One way back to where we belong is the pursuit of a new consciousness that seems so present in the Celts, a form of wisdom that comes to us in the Divine energy that is available to us right here, right now, in the garden we call life, the place where we can let our roots grow deep, and allow ourselves to become strong, productive, fruitful. John O’Donohue refers to this garden as “landscape,” and he asks these questions in such a passionate way: Why is the landscape hardly noticed? Why is it so rarely considered a presence? Why is it abused, raided and raped?

We are very used to talking about the naive and arrogant human, whose blind greediness seeks to own the landscape. It is an expression of the same insecure patriarchy that had to suppress the Divine Feminine in order to maintain its control. The subjugation of earth is the subjugation of the feminine, and as such it is the source of all that is missing in our lives and in our culture. You see, if we are not well-rooted in the earth, if our place in the cosmos is unsettled or untethered, we have to invent a God that we cannot see in order to find meaning in life. And in order to invent a God that we cannot see, we have to obscure the one that we *can* see. Simply put, Celtic consciousness is a way of seeing the God who is here. Patriarchal Christianity is an attempt to look elsewhere. I say, why not start where we are? In O’Donohue’s work, landscape is an expression of God, and he describes it as a shy and quiet presence (though folks in the Carolinas might have reason to disagree this week).

A week ago today at Family Camp, Tripp and I took some free time in the afternoon and did a little wine tasting, and then found our way to a nearby magnificent redwood forest known as Hendy Woods. I had been there last year, but it was Tripp's first visit, and I was excited to show it to him. A number of our folks hiked along the trail above the river to get there, but we came right through the front entrance at the main trailhead. I know that we all know and love the famous Muir Woods, which is spectacular in its own right, but Hendy Woods has no boardwalks and no paved walkways ... and very few people (I have nothing against people, but they tend to make noise). What struck us the very first instant was the exquisite silence all around us. With no man-made walkways for sound to bounce off of, most of the sound is absorbed by the cushioned soil of the forest floor. It's like a sound-proof booth in there. In another way it was a massive cathedral, dark and quiet, filled with the incense of vegetation and rotting tree bark, a few beams of muted light shining almost as through stained glass. It felt as if I was in the presence of God. And then I realized that I was. This human-come-lately, with his preoccupations, his constructed meanings, his desires, his life—this intruder found himself in the presence of Almighty God, and she was as quiet and soft and welcoming as a Divine Mother could be.

I want us to know this morning that the landscape is not only found in a redwood forest. It is right underneath our feet. The gravity of it pulls us downward. Its seeming solidity provides the resistance that we can walk upon. Let's start where we are, in this garden where God lives.



*At "the big tree" in Hendy Woods*