

## **“What a Discovery!”**

Rev. David Gregory

September 22, 2019

15th Sunday after Pentecost



### **First Reading**

Job 12:7-10 from the *Contemporary English Version*

If you want to learn, then go and ask the wild animals and the birds, the flowers and the fish. Any of them can tell you what God has done.

### **Second Reading**

from *Eternal Echoes: Celtic Reflections on Our Yearning to Belong* by John O'Donohue

My neighbor's pony had a beautiful brown foal early in the spring. In the first days, she followed her mother awkwardly on the uneven ground with her long, new, gangly legs. One afternoon as they were both lying down, the new foal got up and moved away on her own a little more confidently, and then more swiftly with every step. Then, suddenly, she found she could move faster, and then she discovered that she could run. It was a marvelous sight. She started to run so swiftly and gracefully, her head held high, circling round and round the stony field. She was utterly ecstatic at the discovery of her new swiftness. She would come back time and again and halt before her mother as if to say: "Hey see what I can do." Each one of us has made a huge discovery that we have never gotten over. This is the discovery of the world. Our first journey was the journey to the earth, and we are still traveling.

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Any of them can tell you what God has done.*

At the United Nations Climate Summit in Poland late last year, a teenager took the world stage, and we were all introduced to the clear, simple, powerful words of Greta Thunberg, and we were introduced to the voice of a new generation. As many of you know, Greta began by visiting members of the Swedish Parliament, which led to the school strikes that went world-wide two days ago. Millions of people around the world gathered in city streets to rally our concerns about climate change. In Poland last December, this is what Greta said:

*For 25 years, countless people have come to the U.N. climate conferences begging our world leaders to stop emissions, and clearly that has not worked as emissions are continuing to rise. So I will not beg the world leaders to care for our future. I will instead let them know change is coming whether they like it or not.*

*Since our leaders are behaving like children, we will have to take the responsibility they should have taken long ago. We have to understand what the older generation has dealt to us, what mess they have created that we have to clean up and live with. We have to make our voices heard.*

I must admit that when I am tempted to despair over the continued violence done to the earth, or when I am wringing my hands over the scourge of gun violence that has been visited on our nation's school children, or when I am awake at night worrying about the rise of unchecked authoritarianism in many parts of the world—including our part of the world—I look at young people who speak truth to power, and I find hope.

*If you want to learn, then go and ask the wild animals and the birds, the flowers and the fish. Any of them can tell you what God has done.*

It's not just the young who speak truth to power. Al Gore, in Friday's New York Times op-ed speaks just as clearly, when he reminds us that we have all the tools necessary to combat and reverse climate change. It only remains for us to exercise the political power to actually do it before it is forever too late. He says:

*Are we really helpless and unwilling to respond to the gravest threat faced by civilization? Is it time, as some have begun to counsel, to despair, surrender and focus on "adapting" to the progressive loss of the conditions that have supported the flourishing of humanity? Are we really moral cowards, easily manipulated into lethargic complacency by the huge continuing effort to deceive us into ignoring what we see with our own eyes?*

*More damage and losses are inevitable, no matter what we do, because carbon dioxide remains for so long in the atmosphere. So we will have to do our best to adapt to unwelcome changes. But we still retain the ability to avoid truly catastrophic, civilization-ending consequences if we act quickly.*

*If you want to learn, then go and ask the wild animals and the birds, the flowers and the fish. Any of them can tell you what God has done.*

This brief quote from the Book of Job, from the oldest words that we have in all Judeo-Christian writings, is something of an aside in the biblical story. The story of Job is the story of when bad things happen to good people. A man who had everything and lost it, including his wealth, his descendants, and finally his own health—this man—has to contend not only with his losses, but with the self-serving, self-righteous advice of his so-called friends. It is Job who actually utters these words, "Go ask the wild animals, and the birds and the flowers and the fish. Any of them can tell you what God has done." His friends were brimming with philosophies, with judgments, and with accusations. They were looking everywhere except right in front of their faces.

There is an inherent wisdom within the creation itself, in the fowl of the air, in the vegetation that springs from the soil, and in everything that swims in the sea. This is not some complicated philosophy that takes volumes to explain. Just look at what is in front of you, and believe what you see. As Greta said this week, “I don’t want world leaders to listen to me. I want them to listen to the scientists.”

As we continue to get to know this sacred earth, this archetypal Divine Feminine from whom we have sprung, this ground beneath our feet, this expression of the God that we can see, what is coming into view is not another trendy spiritual pool for us to dabble in. To say that we are spiritual contemplatives is not to say that we ascend this hill week by week to gather enlightenment for ourselves in our individual journeys. To bring a Celtic Consciousness to our theological understandings, our philosophical leanings, to our spiritual practices, is not to brand ourselves as the people who have finally found the truth that others could find, if only they had the privilege of being us. The life that we are leading here together in this community is meant for more than that. It is meant to take us back into a world that we are going to change. It takes our attention away from the theoretical, and plants us firmly in the soil of the Divine, which is not in some far-off heaven, but right here and now. It’s the earth that we can see and feel and smell and hear. It’s an energy that does not rely on systems or politicians, on governments or institutions. In Greta’s words, change is coming whether they like it or not.

When John O’Donohue spoke of his neighbor’s pony and her beautiful brown foal, he spoke of the very thing that we are trying to say. “Ecstatic at the discovery of her new swiftness, she would come back time and again and halt before her mother as if to say: ‘Hey, see what I can do.’” We have made this same discovery. Collectively, we are beginning to say, “Look what we can do!” This week’s gatherings at the United Nations may or may not yield anything of lasting consequence in regard to change, but we’re not waiting for them. My money instead is on the teenagers.

