

CHURCH TALK, JUNE 23, 2013; GOD IN NATURE, *MOTHER NATURE*

I REMEMBERED THAT I HAD VOLUNTEERED TO SPEAK TODAY WHILE I WAS HIKING WITH FAMILY DOWN IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA LAST WEEK. THAT WAS FINE – BECAUSE I AM GOING TO BASE MY TALK ON OUR EXPERIENCE THERE – BUT I COULDN'T CHECK ON THE LEXIONARY UNTIL I WAS ABLE TO GET ON THE INTERNET – WHICH WAS NOT UNTIL LAST FRIDAY. IN THE PAST, THE SUGGESTED BIBLE READINGS HAVE FIT INTO WHAT I HAD I MIND TO TALK ABOUT BUT, ALAS, THIS TIME THERE ISN'T A SINGLE VERSE THAT RELATES TO WHAT I WANT TO SAY.

I ADMIRE BOB JONES ---FOR NOT ONLY TAKING THE SUGGESTED MESSAGE, BUT CHALLENGING IT. BOB'S TALK -AS WELL AS MARY'S REGULAR APPROACH TO HER MESSAGE – CONSTITUTES A CHALLENGE TO QUESTION, TO DOUBT AND, THEREFORE, TO INTERPRET THE SCRIPTURES. THEY HAVE USED THE READINGS AS A LAUNCHING POINT FOR AN EXCHANGE OF IDEAS.

THE READINGS YOU HAVE HEARD TODAY ARE VALUABLE AS AN ORAL HISTORY OF JUDIASM, ISREAL AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY. BUT THEY DO NOT INFORM OR RELATE TO WHAT I WILL TALK ABOUT.

TO BE HONEST, THE SUBJECT I HAVE CHOSED FOR TODAY – GOD IN NATURE, OR THE DIVINE IN NATURE – DOESN'T HAVE MANY REFERENCES IN THE BIBLE, EXCEPT FOR THE BURNING BUSH OR THE WHIRLWIND FOUND IN THE OLD TESTAMENT. BUT THE BOOK OF PPSALMS OFTEN USES A NATURAL SETTING. THE VERSE I WANT TO READ FOR TODAY IS ONE VERY FAMILIAR TO YOU ALL. PSALM 121.

I WILL LIFT UP MINE EYES UNTO THE HILLS, FROM WHENCE COMETH MY HELP?  
MY HELP COMETH FROM THE LORD, WHICH MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH. HE WILL NOT  
SUFFER THY FOOT TO BE MOVED. HE THAT KEEPETH THEE WILL NOT SLUMBER.

BEHOLD, HE THAT KEEPETH ISRAEL SHALL NEITHER SLUMBER NOR SLEEP. THE  
LORD IS THY KEEPER, THE LORD IS THY SHADE UPON THY RIGHT HAND. THE SUN  
SHALL NOT SMITE THEE BY DAY NOR THE MOON BY NIGHT.

THE LORD SHALL PRESERVE THEE FROM ALL EVIL, HE SHALL PRESERVE THY SOUL.  
THE LORD SHALL PRESERVE THY GOING OUT AND THEY COMING IN FROM THIS TIME  
FORTH, AND EVEN FOR EVERMORE.

THIS IS A GOD, REFERRED TO AS 'WHICH' NOT WHO. HOWEVER, THIS GOD IS  
PROTECTIVE AND IS EXPRESSED BY USING WORDS OF NATURE; THE HILLS,  
COMFORTING SHADE, THE, HOT, STRIKING SUN AND THE MOON. THIS IS A PSALM OF  
COMFORT, EXPRESSED THROUGH NATURE. IT IS COMFORTING TO LIFT UP OUR EYES  
UNTO THESE HILLS AROUND US.

HOWEVER, NATURE HAS ANOTHER FACE.

ONE DAY IN NORTH CAROLINA – WE WERE DEEP IN THE NANTAHALA NATIONAL  
FOREST, WE HIKED A FEW MILES INTO A WILDERNESS AREA. WE THEN SKIDDED  
THROUGH A LAUREL THICKET SO DENSE – AS THE MOUNTAIN SAYING GOES – A DOG  
COULDN'T WAG HIS TAIL IN IT. BUT HOLDING ON TO BRANCHES AND KEEPING LOW,  
WE SLID DOWN A STEEP INCLINE AND ARRIVED AT A POWERFUL WATERFALL,  
CASCADING DOWN OVER ROCKS AND LEDGES IN A DEEP GORGE COVERED WITH  
LAUREL AND RHODODENDRON. THE ALARKA FALLS, THEY ARE CALLED.

THERE IS NO OTHER WAY TO GET TO ALARKA FALLS EXCEPT TO WALK MILES INTO THIS GORGE. IT IS TRUE WILDERNESS – MAGNIFICENT, BEAUTIFUL AND AWE INSPIRING. THE WATER HAS POUNDED AND CRASHED AGAINST THE ROCK LEDGES, DAY AND NIGHT FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS – AS THE WORLD HAS DEVELOPED, ESTABLISHED RELIGIONS, FOUGHT WARS, EXPLORED MIGHTY LANDSCAPES . AND MOVED FROM SMOKE SIGNALS TO SMART PHONES. IT IS CONSTANT AND POWERFUL.

FOR ME, THESE FALLS ARE EMBLEMATIC OF A GREAT FORCE – A GOD LIKE FORCE. THIS FORCE IS NOT SOMETHING TO TALK TO OR PRAY TO –THESE FALLS HAVE NO CONCERN FOR ME. IF I HAD SLIPPED AND FALLEN INTO THE WATER, IT WOULD NOT HAVE LESSENED OR PARTED SO THAT I COULD SAVE MYSELF – I WOULD HAVE IMMEDIATELY BEEN PUSHED OVER THE LEDGES WITH THE FORCE OF THE WATER.

THIS IMPERSONAL MAJESTY AND FORCE REMINDS ME OF THE GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, OMNEPOTENT BUT DISTANT. IT IS A GOD WE HAVE TROUBLE EXPLAINING.

IT IS THE GOD JOB FACED WHEN HE LOST EVERYTHING AND COULD NOT UNDERSTAND. WHY WOULD GOD DO THIS TO HIM, A GOOD MAN?

THERE HE IS IN THE BIBLE STORY, SCRAPING HIS BOILS AND WONDERING WHAT HE DID WRONG TO DESERVE SUCH MISERY. HE IS UTTERLY RUINED, ALL THE PEOPLE HE LOVED HAVE BEEN YANKED FROM HIM AND HE CRIES OUT, “WHY ME LORD?”

IT’S A GOOD QUESTION AND ONE MANY OF US HAVE ASKED AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER. WE CAN CERTAINLY FIND THE UNIVERSE UNRESPONSIVE. JOB SAYS IN JOB

13; 3, "SURELY I WOULD SPEAK TO THE ALMIGHTY AND I WOULD DESIRE TO REASON WITH GOD."

BUT GOD WILL HAVE NOTHING OF THIS. HE WILL NOT BE QUESTIONED. TO JOB'S LAMENT HE RESPONDS;

"WHERE WAST THOU WHEN I LAID THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE EARTH? HAST THOU AN ARM LIKE GOD? CANST THOU THUNDER WITH A VOICE LIKE HIM?

WHO LAID THE CORNER STONE THEREOF, WHEN THE MORNING STARS SANG TOGETHER..... OR WHO SHUT UP THE SEA WITH DOORS WHEN IT BRAKE FORTH, AS IF IT HAD ISSUED OUT OF THE WOMB .. . . AND SAID, 'HITHERTO SHALT THOU COME, BUT NO FURTHER; AND HERE SHALL THY PROUD WAVES BE STAYED."

AND GOD GOES ON TO LIST THE POWER OF NATURE AND THE EARTH – ALL CREATED WITHOUT THE HELP OF A JOB -- EVEN TO THE SMALLEST DETAIL "WHO PROVIDETH FOR THE RAVEN HIS FOOD WHEN HIS YOUNG ONES CRY UNTO GOD.?"

BUT GOD IS NOT JUST BRAGGING – HE HOLDS OUT CREATION FOR CONSIDERATION. ALL THAT IS THE NATURAL WORLD , ITS BIGNESS AND SMALLNESS, ITS INFINITE DETAIL, BEAUTY AND TERROR INTERMIXED. AS CHARLES FRAZIER – THE AUTHOR OF *COLD MOUNTAIN*, SAID ABOUT THIS BIBLE TEXT; "EVEN ITS WILD AND VIOLENT AND ENORMOUS ELEMENTS CONTAIN IN THEIR DETAILS THE SMALLEST AND MOST DELICATE ELELEMENTS; FOR THE EYES OF THE MONSTER ARE 'LIKE THE EYELIDS OF THE MORNING.'"

FRAZIER INTERPRETS THE STORY OF JOB AND GOD AS ; "LOOK AT IT ALL, GOD SEEMS TO BE SAYING. DON'T TROUBLE ME WITH REASON. WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW IS

**THERE** IN THE ART AND THE MYSTERY AND ULTIMATE UNKNOWABLENESS OF MY ELEGANT DESIGN. LOVE IT AND FEAR IT. SUBMIT TO IT. IT IS THE GREAT MYSTERY. “

BUT THIS DISTANCE AND MYSTERY ARE ONLY ONE ASPECT OF NATURE THAT MAKES ME THINK THAT THERE IS A DIVINE SPIRIT WITHIN. THERE IS ALSO A GREAT DEAL OF COMFORT IN NATURE – THE SOFTNESS AND BENIFICENCE OF A SUNSET. THE THRILL OF CLOUDS RACING ACROSS THE SKY, THE MIRACLE OF A SEED SPROUTING – THE ABSOLUTE AND INFINITE NATURE OF EVERY FLOWER, BUTTERFLY OR INSECT. SCIENTISTS ARE NOW TELLING US THAT THERE IS AN INTRICATE, DELICATE BALANCE AMONG EVERYTHING THROUGHOUT THE EARTH – A BALANCE THAT HAS MADE HUMAN LIFE ON EARTH POSSIBLE.

I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK, HOW CAN WE **NOT** SEE GOD, OR A DIVINE PRESENCE ALL AROUND US IN NATURE.

IN NORTH CAROLINA I TOOK OUR GRANDCHILDREN OVER TO THE EASTERN BAND OF THE CHEROKEE RESERVATION TO SEE A PAGENT “**UNTO THESE HILLS**’ ABOUT THE FORCED REMOVAL OF THE CHEROKEE TO OKLAHOMA IN THE 1840’S ON **THE TRAIL OF TEARS**. NATIVE AMERICANS, AS WELL AS CULTURES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD BELIEVED THE SPIRITS THAT CONTROL AND AFFECT THEIR LIVES DID LIVE IN NATURE. THE DANCES, CHANTS, SACRIFICES THAT HAVE COME DOWN THROUGH THE AGES EXEMPLIFY THIS. ONE MESSAGE THAT CAME OUT OF THIS DRAMA WAS THE LOVE OF THE MOUNTAINS . THE WERE FORCED TO LEAVE THEIR LAND, WATER, FORESTS AND STEEP GORGES . BUT THEIR CULTURE WAS NOT SEPARATE

FROM THEIR NATURAL SURROUNDINGS. THIS IS A DEFINING QUALITY OF MANY OF THE NATIVE PEOPLES.

ONE OF THE PSALMS DOES REFLECT THIS TIE OF THE SOUL TO NATURE.

PSALM 23.

<sup>1</sup> (A Psalm of David.) The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup> He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

<sup>3</sup> He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup> Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

BUT GENERALLY, , MOST WESTERN RELIGIONS DO NOT INCORPORATE NATURE INTO THEIR BELIEFS AND CEREMONIES. IN FACT, CHRISTIANITY – AT LEAST INTERPRETED BY SOME – SAID WE WERE TO BASICALLY CONQUER THE EARTH AND USE NATURE'S RESOURCES FOR OUR CIVILIZATIONS' PROGRESS AND BETTERMENT. THERE HAS BEEN

VERY LITTLE –UNTIL RECENTLY – THAT, AT LEAST FROM THE CHURCH PULPITS – ENCOURAGED US TO PROTECT AND HONOR THE EARTH AND MOTHER NATURE.

BY THE WAY, I LIKE THE TERMS ‘MOTHER NATURE’ AND MOTHER EARTH – WITH FATHER SUN UP IN THE SKY.

I WON’T STAY ON MY SOAP BOX LONG – BUT RECENTLY I HAVE BEEN REMINDED OF THE SAYING, ACTUALLY COINED BY WILLIAM CONGREVE IN 1697, ALTHOUGH OFTEN ATTRIBUTED TO SHAKESPEARE AND THE BIBLE,

( AS AN ASIDE, NONE OF US KNOW – I SUSPECT – ANY PLAY BY CONGREVE, BUT THERE ARE THREE OF HIS QUOTES THAT WE ALL KNOW – THIS FIRST IS A QUOTE IS ALWAYS MIS QUOTED,

*MUSIC HAS CHARMS TO SOOTHE THE SAVAGE BREAST – NOT BEAST”,* THE SECOND IS ‘*O FIE, MISS, YOU MUST NOT KISS AND TELL,*”

BUT THE THIRST IS THE OE THAT RELATES TO MY MESSAGE TODAY; IS *HELL HATH NO WRATH LIKE A WOMAN SCORNED.*

AND WE HAVE SCORNED MOTHER EARTH AND HER CREATURES WITH OUR MAD PURSUIT OF FOSSIL FUELS—ASSAULTING THE EARTH AND POISONING THE SOIL, AIR AND WATER. SO NOW WE EXPERIENCE CLIMATE CHANGE – THE EXTREME WEATHER OF AN ASAULTED MOTHER EARTH.

ON MAY 22, I WAS GETTING READY TO DRIVE TO GRAHAMSVILLE FOR A MEETING WHEN THE PHONE RANG. IT WAS A LAW SCHOOL CLASS MATE OF JOHN’S CALLING FROM VIRGINIA, “GET INTO THE BASEMENT RIGHT AWAY! THERE IS A TORNADOE RIGHT OVER ROSCOE. YOU ARE IN DANGER!”

I WAS ALONE – IT WAS DARK AND QUIET OUTSIDE. I THOUGHT –“NOW WHAT DO I DO? “

I DID WHAT I OFTEN DO WHEN I'M HOME ALONE, I CALLED ERIC HAMERSTROM . HE SUGGESTED I WATCH THE WEATHER CHANNEL.

I PUT ON THE WEATHER CHANNEL, WHICH IS NOW BROADCASTING MORE DRAMATICE NEWS THAT FOX OR MSNBC, JUST REPORTING ON THE WEATHER.

THEY WERE SAYING TORNADOES IN ROSCOE, CRAIGIE CLAIR, LEW BEACH – *CRAIGIE CLAIR?* WHILE PICTURES OF THE DEVASTATION IN OKLAHOMA FLASHED IN THE BACKGROUND.

WELL, NO TORNADO TOUCHED DOWN THAT DAY – BUT I REALIZED THAT MORE THAN ONCE IN RECENT YEARS – I HAVE BEEN FRIGHTENED BY THE WEATHER, IT CAN BE REALLY DANGEROUS. NOT ONLY BY THE FLOODS THAT WE ALL KNOW SO WELL BUT THE WINDS, HAIL, ICE STORMS.

BY NOT HONORING MOTHER EARTH, WE HAVE UNLEASHED A GREAT WRATH.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU SAID; *EVERY CREATURE IS BETTER ALIVE THAN DEAD, MEN AND MOOSE AND PINE TREES, AND HE WHO UNDERSTANDS IT ARIGHT WILL RATHER PRESERVE ITS LIFE THAN DESTROY IT.*

WE ARE LUCKY TO LIVE IN A PLACE WHERE WE ARE SO CLOSE TO NATURAL PHENOMONEN. THE SKIES HERE ARE DARK AT NIGHT – NO AMBIENT LIGHT SO WE CAN SEE THE MILKY WAY CLEARLY. I HAVE READ THAT 75 % OF AMERICANS CAN'T SEE THE MILKY WAY BECAUSE OF THE URBAN LIGHT IN THE NIGHT SKY.



WE CAN HEAR THE RIVER WITHOUT DISTANT SOUNDS OF TRAFFIC OR INDUSTRIAL NOISE. THE QUIETEST PLACE IN NEW YORK IS THE POPACTON reservoir. THESE ARE GREAT GIFTS WE HAVE; TO LIVE WITH BOTH THE POWER AND THE BEAUTY OF NATURE.

THERE WAS A, SHORT LIVED PHILISOPHY/ RELIGION THAT WAS VERY AMERICAN AND VERY NEW ENGLAND. THE TRANSCENDENTALISTS. THE MOST FAMOUS PHILOSOPHERS OF THE MOVEMENT WERE EMERSON AND THOREAU – WHO I QUOTED BEFORE. HE SAID.

*I WENT INTO THE WOODS BECAUSE I WISHED TO LIVE DELIBERATELY, TO FRONT ONLY THE ESSENTIAL FACTS OF LIFE, AND SEE IF I COULD NOT LEARN WHAT IT HAD TO TEACH, AND NOT, WHEN I CAME TO DIE, DISCOVER THAT I HAD NOT LIVED. I NEVER FOUND A COMPANION THAT WAS SO COMPANIONABLE AS SOLITUDE.*

AND EMERSON WROTE A LONG POEM NATURE ,(WHICH I WON'T GO INTO) BUT HE ALSO SAID:

ADOPT THE PACE OF NATURE; HER SECRET IS PATIENCE. THEY BELIEVED IN THE INHERENT GOODNESS OF BOTH PEOPLE AND NATURE. THIS BELIEF IS A WONDERFUL GIFT, PARTICULARLY TO BELIEVE IN THE INHERENT GOODNESS OF PEOPLE.

I THANK MY PARENTS FOR THIS GIFT BECAUSE THEY ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT PEOPLE WERE BASICALLY GOOD AND EVERYTHING WOULD WORK OUT FOR THE BEST IN THE END. AND, YOU KNOW, FOR THEM IT DID.

THE TRANSCENDENTALISTS ALSO BELIEVED THAT PEOPLE ARE AT THEIR BEST WHEN TRULY 'SELF-RELIANT' AND INDEPENDENT. THIS IS THE WAY A TRUE COMMUNITY COULD BE FORMED.

I LIKE TO THINK THIS IS THE WAY THE COMMUNITY OF OUR CHURCH HAS BEEN AND IS BEING FORMED.

E.E. CUMMINGS WROTE A POEM THAT COMBINES THE SUBLIME, SEPARATE ESSENCE OF MOTHER EARTH WITH ITS BENEFICENCE.

E. E. Cummings (1894 - 1962)

## O Sweet Spontaneous

O sweet spontaneous earth how often have the doting fingers  
of prurient philosophers pinched and poked thee ,has the naughty  
thumb of science prodded thy beauty .how often have religions  
taken thee upon their scraggy knees squeezing and buffeting thee that  
thou mightest conceive gods (but true to the incomparable couch



**PRAISE FATHER, SONS, AND MOTHER EARTH.**

THE SONS ARE MANY – AND THEY HAVE BEEN MALE- PROPHETS  
AND TEACHERS – CHRISTIAN, JEWISH, BUDHIST, ISLAM -----

BUT MOTHER EARTH IS OUR ROCK, OUR FOUNDATION FROM  
WHENCE WE COME AND TO WHERE WE SHALL RETURN.