

April 4, 2010
Easter Day
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WHAT'S THE WORLD COMING TO?

What's the world coming to? It must be a good sermon title. I found at least eight different songs on iTunes named the same. Including this one by Fleetwood Mac:

There's no truth in my life
There's no light in my eyes
What's the world coming to?
Everyone's gone to the moon
What's the world coming to?

This past week I walked by a bicycle, missing its seat. I saw a sign sticking up where the seat would have been, assuming it had been stolen. But it's the words on the sign that caught my attention: *Why is the world so cruel?*

When weighed down by the troubles of life—the losses, the stress, the loneliness, the violence, the poverty, even the natural disasters—we often join our voices in that song of lament: what is this world coming to?

We have seen the cruel side of human nature as we gathered this past week to hear the story of Jesus' last week on earth. Power threatened. A mob scene. Betrayal and denial. The murder of an innocent man who stood up for the poor and marginalized.

No wonder the psychologist Carl Jung once said: "The only thing we have to fear on the planet is man." And, Picasso: "The world today doesn't make sense, so why should I paint pictures that do?"

What in the world does this have to do with Easter?

I imagine some people were thinking that last night at the Easter Vigil as we told the story of creation from the first chapter of Genesis.

The disciples in today's gospel thought that the story of the empty tomb was an "idle tale." But God creating the world in seven days and seven nights? The "creation versus evolution" debate still rages on in our country. What if we polled all of you here today: do you believe in creation or evolution? I know a lot of you are pretty astute. You'd do the Lutheran theological thing, and answer "yes" to both!

So, what about our world? Since the 1960's a picture of the earth from outer space has been the common heritage of us earthlings. One Arabian astronaut, part of an international crew, recalled: "The first day we all pointed to our own countries. The third day we were pointing to our continents. By the fifth day we were all aware of only one Earth." Another man, who had walked on the moon, noted from that vantage point the Earth is so small you can block it out with your thumb. "Then you realize that on this beautiful warm, blue and white circle is everything that means anything to you." All of nature and history, birth and love. And you are changed forever.¹

A whole lot of Christians in this country, and a lot involved in politics, believe we don't need to be concerned with *this* world. It'll just be destroyed and we'll get a new one! And : some lucky ones will be raptured out of this world. The title of an American bestseller from a generation ago says it all: *The Late, Great Planet Earth*.

What *is* this world coming to? Like the apostles in today's gospel, we can choose to believe the whole resurrection story, the whole creation thing, and even religion itself is an "idle tale." I watched the movie *Religulous* recently, and it makes very compelling points, like Bill Maher saying: "Faith makes a virtue out of not thinking."

Our reading from Isaiah proclaims that God is about to create new heavens and a new earth.

What in the world does this have to do with Easter? Believe it or not, everything.

We gather on the eighth day of the week to celebrate a new creation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's not about how the world came to be billions of years ago. It's not about what literally happened on the third day after the death of Jesus.

Creation continues to happen. Resurrection continues to happen. The risen Christ appears to us gathered here on this Easter day.

Want to see signs of the new creation? Last night Felisa, in her mid-twenties, was baptized here. With us, she now makes a commitment to follow this radical Jesus in the way she lives, loves, and yes, votes.

Want to see signs of the new creation? Look at the ways that countless people proclaim love over injustice as they stand and serve the masses of the world's poor.

If you saw the movie *Avatar* you may have been struck by its spiritual depth. It invites us to reflect on the selfishness and destructiveness of our path of warfare, violence and the use of technology to destroy the earth and those considered subhuman. In the movie, the natives of the planet Pandora offer another way, a way we have long forgotten: reverence for the earth and for the interconnection of all beings.

One scientist said that "every atom of iron in our blood's hemoglobin would not be there had it not been produced in some galactic explosion billions of years ago and eventually condensed to form the iron in the crust of the earth and from which we have emerged." (Arthur Peacocke) In other words, human beings and all creatures on this planet are made of stardust.

We could lament what this world is coming to, or we could learn how to be a people of doxology. The great Jewish theologian, Abraham Joshua Heschel, said that we are called to be cantors of the universe, singing thanksgiving and praise in the name of a whole cosmic community of which we are a part.

But why in the world be part of a church? Can't we sing on our own? Perhaps. But as a community we remind each other of the song of praise and thanksgiving it would be all too easy to forget.

God so loves this world! The earth matters. Easter matters. Bodies matter, for heaven's sake.

Christ is risen. Spring is busting out all over. All things are being made new. God continues to create. God continues to raise us from death to new life. So come to the table, come to the feast! And let Easter rock your world. Our world. God's world.

¹Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*, pp. 181-182