

Rogation B 2022

“Think globally, act locally.”

That old adage occurred to me this week. It was coined by a planner and biologist in the early 20th century, but really came into its own as a bumper sticker in the U.S. in the 1970s with the rise of the environmental movement.

I thought of it because of a word in our Psalm today that can mean many things: the word **earth**.

6 The **earth** has brought forth her increase; *
 may God, our own God, give us his blessing.

7 May God give us his blessing, *
 and may all the ends of the **earth** stand in awe of him.

The earth that yields/brings forth her increase might better be translated “land.” Meaning this fertile area. Consider this paraphrase: our “land offers forth its crop”

“All the ends of the earth” means all nations and peoples, the entire global community as understood by the Hebrew people, and now by us.

When I think globally these days, I sigh a lot.

Our concern about the Covid-19 pandemic, which we keep hoping will become simply endemic, persists, with many parts of the world still under-resourced in vaccines and treatments.

We in the western world are increasingly facing up to the prejudices and structural racism which have maintained an imbalance of power and wealth, at the same time that white nationalism and xenophobia are on the rise.

There are wars, and rumors of wars, and fears of aggression and conflict.

And climate change is upon us, with drought throughout the western U.S., melting ice in the far north and far south, and other extreme weather events around the world. Just a week ago, science-based prognosticators said there is a 50-50 chance that we will reach the 1.5 degrees Celsius increase in average global temperatures

in five years. Other ecological tipping points, such as biodiversity loss, are imminent and irreversible.

Enough!

It is against that global backdrop of inter-connected crises that today we mark Rogation Sunday. In our Anglican roots, this Sunday, and the three days that follow in the run up to Ascension Day, have always been a prayerful celebration of place, of locale. This earth right here, under our feet.

In rural olde England, rogationtide was marked with prayers for a good harvest while beating the bounds - walking the property boundaries - of the parish.

Even though we don't have geographical parishes in the U.S., I think we can benefit from celebrating and observing these days of prayer, both more broadly and more specifically, by revisiting what happened during those processions.

Our most informative commentary comes from the writing of 17th century priest and poet George Herbert. His opinion of rogation practices was not a high one - he called them "quaint country customs" after all - but he does shed light on the purposes. We can consider what they might mean for us here, today.

The first purpose was to seek "a blessing of God for the fruits of the field" - focusing on the particular fields in a particular place.

What about this place? What about our agricultural heritage in Santa Rosa and around Sonoma County? I think about local food production during severe drought. If you planted tomatoes at the beginning of May, your plants have now been treated to hail storms and hot sere winds over a ten day period, and face months with no rain. Many small scale farmers tell me it's now too dry for the practice of dry farming. Community-based food production here is being impacted by diminishing groundwater in places, and by watering restrictions.

Prayer is needed for the fruits of our fields, orchards, and vineyards - this local earth - while we attend to local actions that mitigate the effects of climate change, reduce emissions of CO2 and equivalents, and build resilience. The solar

panels we install today are just the beginning of what we could do collectively, and with God's help.

Second, Herbert noted that the Rogation procession was a time for settling disputes, particularly in preserving and clarifying property boundaries and rights of way.

Land. Last week Stephen spoke of what the parish team is learning about the story of land grabs here, as they work with the Redbud Resource Group. Greater awareness of this history is critical. Can we balance the history of colonization and the settler appropriation of land, of earth in this place, with our present actions?

Access to land is a key challenge as part of a resilient and just food system. Many underrepresented farmers and would-be farmers - young farmers, women farmers, indigenous farmers, latino farmers, Black farmers - are priced out of access to land to grow local, wholesome and culturally appropriate food. Faithlands - freeing up land owned by religious groups for community gardens, urban farms, and small commercial farms - is one movement we might support locally and around California.

(My networking through the Sonoma County Food System Alliance and the Interfaith Sustainable Food Collaborative has helped me learn and meet neighbors who are involved in food and farming issues. Please talk with me about it at coffee hour if you'd like to know more.)

Thinking about the relationships I have made through my community ministry brings me to Herbert's third point. He saw the value in processions of "walking together, and neighborly accompanying one another."

One of my colleagues in gleaning and food recovery talks frequently about "reinvigorating the sharing ethic." Neighborly accompanying in procession did not simply offer an opportunity to resolve differences, like those over fence lines, but also gave people an opportunity for strengthening relationships. Modern day agrarian poet, Wendell Berry wrote - "neighborliness. This means that you would rather have a neighbor than to have your neighbor's farm."

Neighborliness grows when we do things together, and particularly when we do things with those we do not otherwise encounter and talk with in an ordinary day

or week. Think about the times you've worked on a church or community project with those you do not know; think about encountering those whose cultures are very different through a community garden, or through assisting refugee families. Neighborliness is a spiritual practice, with the emphasis on practice.

The fourth point from Herbert is, "Mercy in relieving the poor by a liberal distribution and largesse."

I'm not exactly sure what the details of this were like for Herbert's time and place, but I think we recognize that it isn't just sharing from our surplus - writing a check or donating things we no longer need - but includes that building of relationships implied in neighborliness. Relieving the poor also demands advocacy for change that respects the dignity of every poor and low income person.

In this earth, this land, this place, as we re-emerge cautiously from Covidtide, and re-engage with our community, it would seem to me a good time to look with fresh eyes and hear with fresh ears the concerns of the poor here, and to commit to some next steps in acts of mercy and advocacy.

I envision this congregation making a procession, not as a Sunday afternoon walk together around the community - although that might be fun sometime! - but as a procession of our hearts - through prayer and thought and conversation about local food, land access, building relationships, and companioning the poor.

And it does seem to me that how we understand and engage earth - in the sense of land, this place - enriches our engagement with and prayer for the concerns of all the ends of the earth.

In attending to our place - as our forebears did at Rogationtide, perhaps our concern for Earth with a capital E - our global human neighbors and the whole community of life - will be deepened.

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and may all the ends of the **earth** stand in awe of him [God].