

April 23, 2023  
Third Sunday of Easter

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

\*Call to Worship Psalm 116

The Lord is gracious and merciful,  
and hears us when we call.

The Lord has been good to you.

**The Lord has delivered my life from death,  
my eyes from tears,  
and my feet from stumbling.  
We come with thanksgiving,  
and call on the name of the Lord.**

\*Hymn 246, verses 1-3

Prayer of Confession

**O God, whose presence is veiled from our eyes,  
when we do not recognize you,  
may our hearts burn within us,  
and when feeling is lost,  
may we cling in faith to your Word  
and the power of bread broken.**

**We confess that we do not always live in the spirit of new life.**

**We worry and grow discontent about our circumstances and deny the transforming power  
of the resurrection.**

**Forgive us and call us back to the sacred walk you take with us,  
be it on the highway, or the quiet path.  
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
One God, now and forever. Amen.**

\*Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

Friends, in Jesus Christ we are called to a new way of life, one that overflows with hope, love, forgiveness and reconciliation. Let us walk forward together on this journey of faith, assured that our Lord never leaves us or forsakes us. Be at peace. Amen.

First Reading 1 Peter 1:17-23

Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading Luke 24:13-35

The Morning Message

“What did Jesus have to say about the environment?”

That is the question Presbyterian minister, Leighton Ford, asks the reader in an editorial he wrote for the *Charlotte Observer*.

He goes on to say he owns a variety of Bibles. From King James to the New Revised and so on. But he had never seen or even heard of the *Green Bible* until a young friend gave him one for Christmas.

The cover is not green- it's more of an earth-tone light brown. What makes it “green” is that every word, phrase, and paragraph that mentions the created world is printed in green. Ford says he can flip through the entire thing and hardly find a page without some words printed in green. But, Ford asks, with all the varied Bibles, editors and publishers, in all the languages the Wycliffe people can translate, why would we need another Bible?

He says it's because the earth and all its wonders are gifts of God to us, for our care and our use. In our consumer society, we may go about our days without recognizing the importance of the natural environment. The editors of the *Green Bible* want us to ask of ourselves, “What is my role as a Christian in caring for the earth?”

Leighton Ford is a prolific writer and sought-after preacher. He has long been involved in Christian organizations that focus on the faith development of young people. It doesn't hurt that he is the late Billy Graham's brother-in-law. But Leighton Ford has had a well-known and respected ministry apart from the Billy Graham Association.

In 2016, the year in which this article was published, young people from around the world were gathering to pray about global climate change. The Billy Graham Library was host to one of these gatherings.

Rachel Lamb, one of the national organizers, believes that creation care is a gospel issue. She says, “We know that God created the world, and it belongs to Him and not us...we are only stewards or trustees of God's creation, and we aren't to abuse or neglect it.”

Ford says he can confirm Rachel's statement. Whenever he opens his Bible, he can find hundreds of texts that speak to that very thing:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

“I am establishing my covenant...with every living creature.”

“All the trees of the field will clap their hands.”

“I saw a new heaven and a new earth.”

Another Presbyterian cared deeply and reverently about the environment and was instrumental in preserving the American wilderness.

John Muir, born in 1838 in Dunbar, Scotland, grew up in a strict Presbyterian home. He was well-acquainted with Scripture. He memorized three quarters of the Old Testament and all of the New Testament. He had a fine, agile mind.

Memorizing Scripture was not his only gift. His interests and abilities were far-reaching. John Muir listed his professions as naturalist, author, environmental philosopher, botanist, zoologist, glaciologist, and early activist for the preservation of wilderness in these United States. He was also a husband and the father of two daughters.

Muir wrote extensively about his experiences in nature, especially in the Sierra Nevada. He co-founded the Sierra Club, which still exists, and through his activism, helped preserve the Yosemite Valley and Sequoia National Park.

It is said that “the spiritual quality and enthusiasm toward nature expressed in his writing has inspired readers, including presidents and congress members to take action to help preserve large nature areas.”

According to author William Anderson, Muir exemplified “The archetype of our oneness with the earth.” Another author said Muir believed his mission was to save the American soul from total surrender to materialism.

John Muir's life and work was so vast and his influence so broad, we could go in one of several directions to explore his contributions to American life. But, it is his relationship to God that I wanted to lift up for us.

It is said, that after he had studied Scripture and the works of great theologians and historians, he became attached to the American landscapes he explored, and he began to see another “Primary source for understanding God: The Book of Nature.” In nature, he could study the plants and

animals in an environment that he believed “Came straight from God, uncorrupted by civilization and domestication.”

He came to believe that the best place to discover the true attribute of deity was in Nature. One of his biographers says John Muir styled himself after John the Baptist, whose duty was to immerse in mountain baptism everyone he could. To John Muir, nature was a great teacher, revealing the mind of God.

Lest I portray John Muir as some type of 19<sup>th</sup> century super-hero, it must be said that he was flawed and sinful like the rest of us. Although he renounced the beliefs later in life, Muir was said to have had a scandalous attitude about African Americans, which certainly takes the shine off his character. He is not the first actor in the American story to have shamed us, but it is important to acknowledge truth and do better in our generation.

I usually park in front of the church, which I really enjoy, especially in the springtime, because, rain or shine, signs of God’s presence, like business cards with petals, dot the path. A crocus, a few daffodils, dandelions, and violets. I love the violets. For some reason, they make me feel at home.

John Muir saw nature as providing a home for even the smallest plant life.

He wrote, “The little purple plant, tended by its Maker, closed its petals, crouched low in its crevice of a home, and enjoyed the storm in safety.”

May we all enjoy our storms in safety.

\*Hymn 250 In the Bulb There Is a Flower

\*Affirmation of Faith Apostles Creed p. 35

\*Hymn 581 Gloria Patri

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord’s Prayer

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

Offertory

\*Hymn 606 Doxology

\*Prayer of Dedication

\*Hymn 246, verses 4 and 5

**\*Blessing**

May the work of your hands bring Christ honor.

May your speech and actions reflect the Word of Life.

And may the service you offer be driven by the indwelling Spirit. Amen.

**\*Postlude**