

SERMON: "Labor and Love"
September 3, 2023
Rev Lise Sparrow

We are entering the 40 day Season of Creation with people of faith from around the world. On Friday thousands joined the ecumenical opening service online. Some woke early, some stayed up late and everything in between.

The Season of Creation was established by the World Council of Churches in 1989 as a time for Christians to renew our relationship with our Creator and all creation through celebration, conversion, and commitment together. During the Season of Creation, we join our sisters and brothers in the ecumenical family in prayer and action for our common home.

This year we look to the Prophet Amos who cries out: *"But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!"* (Amos 5: 24)¹

So I want to tell you about two river pilgrimages.

The first is the Kairos Earth trip² sponsored by Episcopal and UCC churches in 2017. For 40 days and nights several hundred people took part in the pilgrimage which continued all along the Connecticut watershed, some for days, some for weeks and some for the entire journey in canoes all the way from Northern New Hampshire to Long Island Sound. I imagine some of you may have been involved--as congregations along the river hosted the travelers for meals and worship.

One woman said:

"It was such a fabulous, moving moment that I started praying out loud," she said. "I was just moved. ... That was what the pilgrimage was about, so that we could connect with nature and commit ourselves once again to doing a better job of taking care of this

¹ see <https://seasonofcreation.org/>

² <https://kairosearch.org/>

world that we've been given, and this river that we have been given.”³

The second story I learned about from Judy Dow, an Abenaki leader in Vermont. She suggested I watch the film “Canoes: Pulling Together” as away to understand the ritual of land acknowledgements. Indigenous filmmaker James M. Fortier chronicles a 14-day journey through inland waterways of British Columbia capturing the heart, and the heartaches of the Muckleshoot tribe’s determined effort to share and revive their traditional canoe culture with their disaffected youth. To the Indigenous of the Pacific Northwest, tribal canoes are family, they each have a spirit, and they are a connection to the forests, trees, salmon, and waters that are sacred. And, these canoes are the way that families, hunting parties, fishing people, and newcomers traveled throughout the region for centuries before there were roads and other methods of getting around⁴.

As the film begins, the rituals of greetings and prayers are done only under duress by the youth but as the days of travel involve physical challenges, cultural differences, and personal obstacles, the significance of the canoe and its relationship to water and the earth become central and the efforts of the generations have to come together.

“Reflecting the traditions of their ancestors, the Muckleshoot canoe ”family’ learns to put the group before the individual in order to survive the often-treacherous waters of Washington’s Puget Sound One canoe family member, Les Nelson Jr. ,says, ‘The strongest person in the world cannot pull the canoe alone, you have to pull together.’” And in the final arrival the young people evolve their own ceremonies for honoring each other, the water and the land and all creatures.

³ <https://www.registercitizen.com/lifestyle/article/Connecticut-River-pilgrimage-takes-paddlers-on-11959831.php>

⁴ <https://www.theurbanist.org/2023/08/05/canoe-journey-2023-reconnects-regional-tribes-to-each-other-and-local-waterways/>

Their story is not unlike our biblical tradition in which wilderness peoples depend on God and each other to survive –as we shared this morning in our responsive reading, Psalm 65,

“the Great Spirit is the hope of all the ends of the earth and all the seas...The river of God is full of water---who doest still the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples..”

I mention both of these water pilgrimages because these next weeks will be another kind of holy adventure together. I know for many of you loving creation is a daily practice, and a yearning for justice is something you carry in your hearts, and I hope this next month gives space for that love and yearning -and for some hope.

Let us take solace in the words we are given in Isaiah 43.

Do not be afraid, the prophet says

I am with you;

I will bring your children from the east
and gather you from the west.

Bring my sons from afar

and my daughters from the ends of the earth—

⁷ everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made.”

This is what the LORD says—

¹⁸ “Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past.

¹⁹ See, I am doing a new thing!

Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?

I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland.

Many theologians believe that new thing was a new God—son of the creator—

But also human—a compassionate God:

Bishop Desmond Tutu wrote:

“At the center of Christian faith and the Bible is the Cross. Jesus is described as our Peace, the one who has broken down the wall of partition. He says of his ascent to the cross, and I when I am lifted up will draw all people to myself (John 12:32) as if in the cosmic embrace Jesus would would to enfold all that God has created. The entire universe into unity. His supreme work is to reconcile us to God and to one another and, indeed to reconcile us to all of God’s creation. It is possible to have a new kind of world where there will be more compassion, more gentleness, more caring, more laughter, more joy for all God’s creation, because that is God’s dream. And God says, “help me, help me, help me realize my dream.”

These next 40 days are to be spent opening ourselves to the joys of each day, to our yearnings for peace and justice..and to opening our eyes to what might be possible.

Let us pray as the Abenaki would pray:

Good morning to the now waning moon **micheeneekesos**
And Wantastegok Wajo, Mount Wantastiquet
Great River *Kwanitekw*, *The great Connecticut River* we also greet you!
And the rivulets nearby, murmuring their stories, as you make your way through stone and sand, branch and soil, to join you
Good morning wetlands, creeks and ponds who feed the great watershed
We remember the peoples who have traveled south into the ocean
And north to hunt and fish
Who gather and celebrate in the Great Valley, Ndakinna,
Good Morning aster and ragweed
Milkweed and Sumac
Greetings to the bees who flit among the hydrangea
And goldfinch chirping

Good morning hawks circling,
And early geese forming for your long flight south
This morning we remember our ancestors
How they would gather at these times
To give thanks
To harvest
And share together
Their stories
And tragedies
Their abundance
And visions
May we remember them
And all our ancestors who have brought us to this place and time
That we may work together with integrity and respect for all beings
All history
And all possibility. AHO.