

*Based on *2 Corinthians 5:16-17. Paul casts a vision of never-ending creation.*

**incarnational translation below*

To everything there is a season, says the poet of the Scriptures. A time to every purpose under heaven.

There is a time to tell the truth about the human condition. About the frailties of our bodies and minds and spirits. About our collective moral failure that leads to such great injustice, as we have seen all too clearly with COVID and systemic racism and the recent violence of flagrant military aggression. About our utter dependence on grace to get us through one hard moment to the next.

And there is a time to hold up a vision of who we can be when, in the words of our own SPC poet, Ed Zahniser, we fix our minds *on Christ and let the myriad things flow through us*. We hold up this vision, in part, through the painting of Paradise hanging just above the organ console and just below the angels declaring peace among religious and spiritual traditions. We hold up this vision, in part, through the font of identity, which declares as the Standing Rock Sioux have reminded us, “Water is Life,” and this particular water, in some mysterious way, is “Life Abundant.” We hold up this vision, in part, at the table, where again in some mysterious way, we say all who are hungry are fed in body and soul, and all who are fed learn to hunger and thirst for justice.

There is a time to tell the truth and there is a time to hold up a vision of hope, and the challenge for us all is figuring out what time it is.

Not telling the truth is, well, dishonest. Escapist. Pie in the sky by and by evasion of ethical action in the here and now. But we can linger in the hard truth too long, at least I can, becoming so paralyzed by the pain of being human that we flat out ignore the grace of *seven oceans* soaking our desert longing with life-giving hope.

The apostle Paul knows this as he picks up his multi-year correspondence with the early church in Corinth in our Lesson for today. Back and forth Paul has traveled rhetorically in his letters these several years in his care for the Corinthians. From hard truth-telling on the one hand to charismatic vision-casting on the other. Calling the people to account for their failures in one breath, then calling the same people to greater goodness through their anointing in The Way of Jesus in the next breath.

It can feel like whiplash to the Corinthians and to us, and in fact it probably is, and it is probably by design. Paul’s point, after all, is to jolt us out of both the ignorance of escapism and the drama of curling up in the fetal position because we just can’t handle the truth. Paul wants us to see clearly through the this-and-that of each little thing into The Big Picture of Never-Ending Creation. To tell the truth about how desperate we are for the grace of God *and* to frolic in the overflowing stream of that grace.

This is, in our whimsical way, what Lynn Dampman, William Gonano, Suellen Myers, Debbie Romano, Rie Wilson, and yours truly were trying to do during what I hope will become the *First Annual Holy Dunkers Fundraiser for Climate Justice* in the chilly waters of the Potomac River. Our minds and hearts and bodies were

certainly concerned with the cold front that just so happened to move through our region the night before our plunge. But the bigger picture of never-ending creation was emphatically the point behind it all, and a point this congregation has been trying to make for decades.

Creation does include us in a beautiful and powerful way. But creation is also so much bigger than us. We ignore that at our peril. Truth-telling about climate change is so scary it can lead us to throw our hands up in despair. These past couple of weeks have brought even more despair. Just reading the headlines of the most recent United Nations report led me to declare at a staff meeting, “We’re screwed, y’all!” [A staff member suggested I use that as a sermon title; I settled on “Visioning” instead.]

When it comes to climate justice, twenty-first century vision must channel the rhetorical gymnastics of the Apostle Paul as they tell us the truth on the one hand and hold out hope for a new creation on the other. Which is what entomologist Doug Tallamy does in the book that inspires the focus for the funds raised through this event.

Conservation starts in your yard, Tallamy says. And a reminder that the little patch of earth assigned to you by property deed or even rental agreement is in fact just as much a part of God’s Never-Ending Creation as you are. That it needs just as much care and attention and connection to the whole as you do. That it can be just as much a force for the greater good as you can.

By converting our own private lawns into natural habitats, Tallamy says, that preserve and protect the insects and other animals that function as pollinators, the bees and the caterpillars, for example, we really can save the world. Not just for the plants and animals that pollinate but for ourselves as well because we depend on these pollinators for food production.

It sounds strange, I know to come to church some Sunday morning and hear a preacher call us to the moral imperative of lawn care. Stick to The Ten Commandments, I can hear the critics say. But there is a time to tell the truth and there is a time to hold up a vision of hope, and when it comes to our climate it seems we are living in double-time. Truly, for this moment of time, in this twenty-first century climate crisis, Christian ethics demand we reclaim our baptismal connection with *all* of creation. Including the pollinators.

Which is another way of saying, in the spirit of the Apostle Paul that when we fix our minds on The Anointing we are promised in The Way of Jesus, when we learn the wisdom, as Ed Zahniser reminds us, of *the God of desert adaptations*, we really can become *a new creation*.

So in a spirit of truth-telling *and* vision-casting on this Fourth Sunday in Lent, 2022, it is time for all of us to take a metaphorical plunge into the Potomac. As a wake up call for climate justice. As a renewal of our baptismal promise that an entirely new way of life can come into being. And as a glimmer of hope that humanity truly can become so aligned with our Creator that we finally do become a blessing for the entire creation.

Let the holy dunking begin, Amen!

2 Corinthians 5:16-17

*It is time to stop sizing one another up
as if the daily drudge of mere mortality
is the end of our story.*

*Even though The Anointed One, himself,
was mortal, like us,
we think of him differently now.*

*The point is this:
when we choose to participate in The Anointing,
we become part of something even greater:
The Big Picture of Never-Ending Creation.*

*All that no longer matters just falls away.
It is amazing!
An entirely new way of life comes into being.*

*"Incarnational translation for preaching seeks to recontextualize biblical texts so that they say and do in new times and places something like what they said and did in ancient times and places" (Cosgrove and Edgerton, **In Other Words: Incarnational Translation for Preaching**, 62).