

Sermon August 27, 2017    God is the field before us    Cara B. Hochhalter

Exodus 1:8-2:10    and    Matthew 16:15-20

How is it that stars have lived for eons...in harmony? The beautiful poem by St. Thomas Aquinas in your bulletin, asks some tough questions. Why is it that stars can live in harmony while humans seem to find every opportunity to be at odds.

It is rather awesome to imagine the heavens, the stars, sun and moon...and other galaxies, too...other universes, even, all living in harmony? This is when my mind can't quite handle it...what is beyond, beyond...and is it all harmonious?

Did you all try to "see" the eclipse? It was my day off and Jeff and I were doing errands...I took my colander with me, excited to see multiple little moons in the place of circles created by the sun pouring through my kitchen utensil. We stopped in Greenfield and people in Energy Park shared their glasses to look through and I saw it starting...the mysterious sliding of the moon over the face of the sun...beautiful!

Then we drove to Amherst and I held my colander in my lap in the car...excited to see the sun shine on it...and lo and behold, they were complete circles! What!? I knew the eclipse was happening, where were the, crescents? Perhaps it was something about the light coming through the windshield of the car? We got out in Amherst but then it was a little cloudy and I was embarrassed to be holding my antique colander over the sidewalk...

As we sat in front of Starbucks... we saw a fireman seemingly use his cell phone to look up at the sun? I went over and asked if he was taking a picture and he explained that you could see the reflection of the eclipse on the screen of your phone! There it was! So Jeff and I sat with our cell phone and iPad and "looked" at this miracle of the heavens. Being connected to the largeness of our galaxy felt exciting, and a kind of unity to people all over the country who were also looking...as well as the people around me on the street, even the firemen, were suddenly brought together by an event that was beyond any of our control...and it was, for a few moments, just beautiful...and then everyone just went back to the business of whatever we were doing.

Let us be in prayer: God of all the heavens, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together, be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Aquinas goes on to say that our hearts "irrigate this earth." What a sentence. Our hearts, our love, is what nourishes this earth...and that we are *fields before each other*. What does that mean? We are fields before each other. I am not sure, but I love the sound of it!

I adapted it a bit and made this be the sermon title: *God is the field before us*. What images come to your mind? God stretching out before you like a field...is your field rich and diverse with multiple kinds of plants, birds, butterflies, bees...full of color and life? Is your field more orderly, regimented, lush with growth but meticulously planned and ordered? Perhaps your field seems cold and lifeless at times, rocky and furrowed...yet the seed lies just under the surface? You know there are seeds that can wait around for years and years until enough moisture allows them to burst open with life? Maybe your Holy Field is an expanse of possibility just waiting to happen?

Of course a field will eventually turn into a forest...which is fine...unless a person intervenes, then it can become something else...God is the field before us...what will you do with it? How is God calling you to intervene...in it?

When Moses was a baby...he was born into a scary situation, indeed, and it was women who intervened....some would say they allowed the story of God to unfold.

The "field" was looking pretty bleak for Hebrew males. There was a new Pharaoh who was more ruthless, for sure, than the one who had hired Joseph to be his administrator. This Pharaoh found the Hebrew people to be multiplying too fast for his liking...they were even starting to call themselves a "nation"....and this Pharaoh, felt threatened... Walter Brueggemann writes that "Pharaoh did not see the vibrancy of these 'resident aliens' as gifts for Egypt, but a problem." Sound familiar?

What a parallel to our times....when there are those who cannot see that the beauty and gifts that people and cultures who are different than us, can enrich us all.

I was reminded of this when talking to the Colombian-American woman we visited two weeks ago. Maria is the sister-in-law of the woman I lived with in Colombia. She teaches Spanish in a High School in Philadelphia...the city of brotherly love. She said that Spanish-speaking youth come to talk to her all the time, telling her how frightened they are with a seemingly new hatred for immigrants in this land. Maria told me that even though she herself, has lived in the US for 41 years and is a US citizen, she also feels a growing fear and a sense that "she is not welcome here." Maria is a beautiful, extremely intelligent woman...but she told me that one time a woman behind her in a

line told her to *go back where she came from*. I was ashamed that Maria would not feel welcome in her own country, a country we share.

The Pharaoh ordered the male Hebrew babies killed....but the midwives could not do this, they explained that the Hebrew women just were so strong that they had their babies before the midwives came! Women, intervened to save the lives of innocent babies!

When a Levite woman had a little boy, she hid him for three months...but then took him down to the river; made a little basket, coated it with bitumen and placed her baby there, sending him into the river and praying that God would protect him.

Moses, whose name meant "drawn from the water" was literally *drawn from the water* by a daughter of Pharaoh--- In a beautiful twist, his own mother is called to nurse the baby and even got paid for it! But irony of irony, Moses grows up in the very home of the Pharaoh who tried to have boys like him killed...women intervened and brought these two forces together...and God's story unfolds leading eventually to Moses freeing the Hebrew people.

Kathryn Matthews writes that God's intervention is not dramatic with sweeping events, but through small acts using women, sisters, baskets, babies, water, nursing mothers...and yet they all took great risks. They were "working around the edges yet right under the heel of power that had gone bad." Brueggeman calls this Pharaoh, "One whose name we cannot remember, because if you have seen one Pharaoh, you have seen them all. But this nameless 'Lord of Egypt' *tried to stop the music...*"

How is God trying to intervene in our days...what small ways might God be urging us to employ in order to keep the music of life and love from dying under our own nation's leadership? If God is the field, how must we intervene, as women and men, children and youth, too! What kinds of clever but loving acts; speaking out for the inclusive justice that we believe nourishes all life and is at the root of all our faith stories? Did you know that sixth graders, Sierra Upton and Auriel Nalbandian, have formed a club to do good works in the community...they meet under a blue-tarped tent in their yard. Right now they have two members.

Heather Heyer, was the woman who bravely demonstrated against the neo-Nazis in Charlottesville...but then was tragically run down by a truck. Her mother has been speaking out. I think she must love this story of the Egyptian women who stood up to the Pharaoh....who made a difference with their actions. Heather's mother implores us all to find that spark in our hearts that urge us to make a difference...to have those

difficult conversations, to channel our anger and differences into actions for the good of all. What a brave woman Heather was and what a brave woman her mother is to speak out for her daughter, now. It occurred to me that she is "taking care of the love in her heart, by speaking out."

The Egyptian women, the princess of Pharaoh and the others..."they took care of their hearts" by acting on their compassion.

In closing....let's just take a peek at the Gospel reading...Matthew 16:15-20.. Two things stand out for me...one is that Jesus asks his disciples "Who do people say that I am?...Who do you think that I am?"

And secondly, he more or less hands the keys to the future of the church to Peter...on this rock, Petra means rock, so there is a little twist there...On this rock....and by the way, I saw the big rock on the shores of the Sea of Galilee where this was supposed to have happened...its big boulders were broad and strong...could have been off the Maine coast...

So I am going to leave you with two questions to ponder....who do you say Jesus was? And what kind of a church do you think Jesus imagined into the future?

Of course I would like to think it was one just like ours....Maybe so, maybe not?

It certainly felt like church here yesterday when the whole town came out to remember a man, Norman Hicks...to share stories and to remember him in such a beautiful way...we were all together, in this place.

Who do YOU say Jesus is? And how do you think Jesus imagined the church? And what are we doing to take care of the love in our hearts?

Amen.