

Lectionary Reflections for Earth Sunday: April 28 (Easter 2, Year C)

(Acts 5:27-32/Psalm 150/Revelation 1:4-8/John 20:19-31)

Orthodox theologian Dr. Elizabeth Theokritoff tells a story of a hermit and his disciples whose hermitage was situated near a marsh. One spring night the frogs in the marsh were singing so loudly that the hermit and his disciple were distracted in their prayers. So the hermit asked one of the disciples to go and ask the frogs to wait until the monks had finished praying the midnight office. The disciple went to convey this message to the frogs, and shortly returned with a message to the hermit. "Elder, the frogs say, "We've already finished the midnight office and we're starting matins, so perhaps you could wait until we finish."

This little story reminds us of the truth of Psalm 150, v. 6: "Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!" And if we look at Scripture, not only animate creatures are involved in the praising God, but non-animate creation as well. Trees clap their hands. (Isaiah 55:12). The heavens tell of the glory of God (Ps. 19:1). Hills gird themselves with joy, and valleys shout and sing (Ps. 65:12-13). And in Revelation 5:13, which we will read next week, every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea gives blessing and honour and glory to the Lamb.

This week's reading from Revelation describes Jesus Christ as the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth, the Alpha and the Omega. Such language reminds us that Jesus is the creator and redeemer of all things, in whom all things hold together (Col. 1:17). All creation is included in the redemptive work of Christ, who has made us "priests serving his God and Father" (Rev. 1:6). The metaphor of redeemed humanity as the priests of creation is a common one in Eastern Orthodox theology, which sees humanity as called to join and lift up the praise of all creatures to God, rather than exploiting and stifling the praises of the non-human creation.

In the Gospel reading, we encounter Thomas as one who demands irrefutable proof of Jesus' resurrection. Thomas, as we have seen him earlier in the Gospels, is a realist, a pragmatist. Because he was not with the disciples earlier, he had not seen what they had seen. But the disciples continued to speak of their experience of Christ's resurrection – the Greek expresses an ongoing activity – encouraging Thomas to join them and see if this was in fact the case.

Today there are many who express skepticism of the extent, cause, and significance of our current environmental crisis. Maybe some are unaware of the impacts climate change has already brought to the earth and the human family: they have not seen the wounded body. Some may attempt to offer another interpretation, one which is less radical, which doesn't lead to uncomfortable questions about our own contribution to the crisis or what this means going forward. But the other disciples continue to bear witness to what they have experienced, and invite Thomas to join them in experiencing it too. And Thomas is at least willing to be convinced, to allow himself to be confronted by the fact of Christ's slain and resurrected body. Not only does he intellectually assent; his confession of faith (v. 28) shows that he is more than convinced – he is compelled to reorient his whole life around what the resurrection means.

Jesus evokes God's creation of humankind by breathing on the disciples as God breathed life into Adam (Gen. 2:7), sending them out as the Father has sent him. By Jesus' resurrection, we too are re-created, filled with the Holy Spirit and commissioned to bring good news to the world God loves and redeems. At times, as the early disciples experienced, this mission may challenge us to obey God in the face of opposition from human authority (Acts 5:29). But our encounter with the living Christ, and the Holy Spirit He has breathed within us, give us strength to live in a new way, a way that bears witness to a redeemed and restored creation in which everything that has breath may praise the Lord. – Elin Goulden (2019)