7 Easter – June 5, 2011
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Acts 1: 6-14
Psalm 68: 1-10, 33-36
1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11
John 17, 1-11

Blessed, Broken, Fed

In the name of God the Creator of Love, God the Beloved, and God the Spirit of Love –

From today's psalm: *You sent a gracious rain, O God, upon your inheritance; you refreshed the land when it was weary. Your people found their home in it; in your goodness, O God, you have made provision for the poor. [Today I define the word "poor" as all that is broken in our world and in need of our help and action].*

Our spring so far – throughout this Easter season – has hardly featured "gracious rain" either here in Vermont or in many others parts of our country and our world. It has been more like the verse in the psalm that precedes the gentler language I just read. More like, *Oh, God, when you sent forth before your people, when you marched through the wilderness…the earth shook and the sky poured down rain.* On the letter board sign at our local nursery in Shelburne its says, "enough already!"

Toady as we focus on our environment, on the healing of our good earth, on how to create and nurture sustainable communities, what are we to make of the extremes of weather we have experienced or witnessed in the last year? Two articles from the *Burlington Free Press* caught my eye in the last week. The first was last Sunday. In the *Green Mountain* section there is a boxed area each week titled, *Earthweek, the Diary of the Planet,* and within that section there was a snippet that led with the words "Extremely Normal." The article read, *Dramatic swings between very wet, very dry and catastrophically stormy weather are likely to be the norm from now on, according to scientists who point to an overall warmer global climate as the source of the new meteorological reality. "It's a new normal, and I really think that global weirding is the best way to describe what we're seeing,"* reported one scientist. Then in Tuesday's edition Candace Page wrote an article informing us that Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin has begun talking to Quebec Premier Jean Charest about changes the state and province will need to make to adjust to continued flood threats related to higher water. Governor Shumlin said, *Extreme weather driven by climate change will require a change in thinking in the way governments plan for the future. We've got to think big;* he continued, *We have to be realistic that the challenge is not smaller, it is greater.* The governor then said that Premier Charest asked him: *How do we work together to face the music, that our assumptions about lake levels have to change?*

How do we face the music? Something has definitely changed in the way we think about our environment. Sometime in the last decade we stopped talking about being able to stop global warming and return to a pre-global warming status, instead – it seems – we are now talking about slowing it or containing it – adapting to it and learning to live with it. The conversation is now about limiting the damage, about protecting and healing our

environment in the face of drastically changed circumstances. What does it mean to be environmental stewards in the face of this new paradigm? What role can we take in binding up this sorry world?

My hope returns to the words of today's psalm. *Your people found a home in your creation.* And we still find a home in God's world, even in a world that is wetter, warmer, and with a more unpredictable climate – a world that is still full of wonder and a world where miracles still happen all around us. Increasingly we share our concern for God's creation and all that is in it with other faith communities of all kinds, with other nations – rich and poor. It is a natural place of mission, and is – in fact – a place of action that brings us together even with faith communities with which we have very little in common otherwise. We can be united in working as stewards toward a sustainable environment in the world God created for us, for all animals, for all things animate and inanimate.

It is hard not to worry when faced with the certain fact that we have changed our world in so many ways as our human footprint becomes larger and more destructive. In today's epistle we heard: *Cast your anxiety on [God] because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around looking for someone to devour. Resist [evil], steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.* One manifestation of the devil – or evil – is the environmental degradation flowing from our waste, and wanton misuse of our resources that we have allowed to happen and continue to allow on our watch.

Imagine with me that our very faith, the faith we practice here in prayer, song, silence and word week after week, is one of the answers. Perhaps one of the answers is right under our collective noses. Keeping alert to the needs of the world around us and disciplining ourselves in the way we live our lives minute-to-minute and day-to-day, as individuals and as a community, is a piece of the answer. Even more important is deepening our understanding that replacing the misuse of our resources with a new consciousness of environmental stewardship and sustainability will help. It will ease the suffering, not only to own community and lessen the threat to our own children, but also to our brothers and sister the world over!

We are living in a broken time – it is not the first time we have faced brokenness. As Christians we know about brokenness, suffering and salvation. Each Sunday we enact a story about God, a story that involves blessing, breaking and giving. The presider at the Eucharist blesses the bread and wine, breaks the bread, and then gives it to us broken so that we may be one with God's brokenness, so that we may be healed. Perhaps, our work now is to understand and internalize the brokenness of our world – of our environment – so that we may gather up the pieces – remembering that even in their brokenness they were and are blessed. A blessing is not frozen or forgotten in a single moment. As in loving relationship, it abides in us and endures in the world. In gathering up the pieces and offering them to each other, we make a step toward healing the wounds of the world and our planet even as we feed and nurture each other. Every action we take in conserving resources is a broken piece we pick up and offer to the world.

This morning we are doing three vitally important things – all give us the faith-born energy to face a new environmental reality. At the end of this service, we will be blessing our memorial garden and the gardens at Three Cathedral Square as a reminder to us of our duty to care for all of God's gardens – wherever they may be – no matter how flooded or parched. We are also celebrating the graduation of some of our EFM - Education for

Ministry students – who have completed four years of theological education. They have studied hard, shared their spiritual stories over and over again, learned to use theological metaphor to understand the small and large events in the world around them, and created a faith community that comes alive each Wednesday evening. A deeper knowledge of the history, stories, and metaphors of our faith leads to a more powerful understanding of our duty as Christians, a vital element in our ability to stay alert to the needs of the world. We are also celebrating the amazing music that our youth choirs provide each Sunday with such joy power and passion. Today is their last Sunday before they take the summer off. Proclaiming the joy and power of God's creation in song lifts us up and buoys us to move forward with action, even in the face of a broken world. Especially in the face of a broken world! [Add exhortation to youth at 10:00 to not accept the world, the environment, or news about the future of the earth it is – but resolve to make it different.]

This week in Baltimore I had the pleasure of talking to Mary Gray-Reeves, the Bishop of the Diocese of El Camino Real in California who told me her take on the rapture. She said, "First of all, I don't believe in a God who would take up a select few and leave the rest of humanity and creation behind, frightened sick, and suffering. Even if this did happen, I know where Jesus would be, he would be right there with those left behind taking care of God's children in their fear and suffering." Then she said, "I know where I would be – right here walking and working with Jesus." And that's where we would be too! If fact, I know I would rather be here in this imperfect world, attempting to mend the broken pieces, than in a hoped for paradise, some imagined Garden of Eden.

A favorite folk song of mine is *Golden Thread*, written by Pete Seeger (Pete and I share a birthday). We sing in the first verse, *Oh, had I a golden threat and needle so fine, I'd weave a magic strand of rainbow design... Show my brothers and sisters my rainbow design, bind up this sorry world with hand and heart and mind.*

And here we all are, right here with Jesus – binding up this sorry world with our own golden thread and needle so fine, using all of our hands and hearts and minds. We are blessed, broken and fed, and in this continued blessing lies our strength, our hope and our answers. The answers lie here and at home in the care we give our gardens and God's resources, here in the study we do in all our formation programs, and here in the joy of our music – and here in the face of a new environmental paradigm that compels us to limit the damage and find new and creative ways to heal earth's wounds. Even now in a time of brokenness God's blessing does not stop. When we need it, God sends the sun to dry up all the land and when we are parched a gracious rain. Remember that God cares for us. Let us stay alert and discipline ourselves in our use of resources and create a new habit of stewardship as we care for God's precious world.

You sent a gracious rain, O God, upon your inheritance; you refreshed the land when it was weary. Your people found their home in it; in your goodness, O God, you have made provision for all that is broken. How wonderful is God in God's holy places!

AMEN