

Keene Valley Congregational Church, NY

**Whistling in the Dark**

Excerpt from Aldo Leopold

Job 38:1-7; 39:26-30; 40:1-2; 42:1-6

A Reflection offered by Katharine M. Preston

“Above all we should, in the century since Darwin, have come to know that man, while now captain of the adventuring ship, is hardly the sole object of its quest, and that prior assumptions to this effect arose from the simple necessity of whistling in the dark. “

Why do we whistle in the dark? We whistle to distract ourselves. Maybe to help us to remain brave. We whistle to fool ourselves into thinking that the darkness is not really as bad as it seems.

Job didn't even bother to whistle in the dark – he simply challenged God to tell him *why*, *why* have all these horrible things happened to me? And God answers him out of the whirlwind: Job, you need to understand your place in the scheme of things: the focus of my creative energy is so much more vast, so intricate, so much bigger than one particular human being – even you, my servant, Job - and indeed, so much bigger than human beings in general.

This is the connection between these two readings for me: God reminding Job that we are not the *sole* objects of God's affection and creation.

Aldo Leopold reminding us of the same thing: we are not the sole object of the adventuring ship of the earth's processes.

There are many, many challenges and issues demanding our attention these days. Immigration, health care, social justice, hunger, out-of-control partisanship, incivility. They are all important. But these are exclusively human being issues. Climate change is different.

Climate change is not just about people.

Climate change – the quiet, inconvenient truth that only makes headlines when a new report comes out, detailing that the predictions are even worse than the scientists thought. It is increasingly more dire – no wonder the quiet truth

quickly dissolves into the background of our thoughts (not to mention any political discourse!) because it is essentially more impossible for us to face.

Some are beginning to realize that the darkness really **is** as bad as it seems.

So we whistle in the dark:

Fooling ourselves into thinking that there have always been cyclical changes in the climate.

Fooling ourselves into thinking that really hot summers are not nice – but...hey, our growing season here in the North Country has been extended by a number of weeks. And although we stubbornly and proudly resist the temptation, air conditioning remains an option., at least for those of us who can afford it...

Fooling ourselves that the worst effects of climate change are still pretty far away from here. Far away in the deserts of central Africa, the little island nations of the South Pacific, or in Bangladesh.

Well, maybe also in Houston, New Orleans, or Mexico Beach, Florida.

Way down there in Rockaway on Long Island.

Or...maybe along the Boquet River way over near where I live in Essex.

Or.... maybe along the East Branch of the Ausable River – who overflowed her banks during Irene.

Not quite as far away as we would like to think.

What might God say to us today – if we confronted God as Job, did, asking why is this happening, God?!

Maybe God is speaking to us out of the storms: Out of Harvey, Katrina, Michael, Irene, Sandy, Maria:

Listen!

“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the world?

“Do you not understand the physics, the chemistry, the biological processes that I created? Do you not understand they are very simply running an accelerated course when you add momentous amounts of carbon to the atmosphere? Do you

not understand that the hurricanes will be made worse, and more frequent because of the warming air?

“You humans can change the climate – even radically – but ultimately – the systems will adjust *just as I created them to do*.

“You human beings are not the only object of my quest and my love *but you are a beloved part*. Can you not anticipate that your sisters and brothers less fortunate than you will die or lose everything they own, because you ignore your place in the system of my creation?

Accept this, accept your true place, human beings, and then *work with me, alongside*, to mitigate the damage to so many members of your species and others in the decades and centuries to come.

“For I am alongside you”, says God. “I am in the whirlwind, the hurricane because they are of me. But you are of me as well.”

“Whistle in the dark. *I am there with you.*”

I want to share with a poem I was sent – just as I was writing this sermon. (I call these coincidences “Holy Spirit stuff”!) It was written by my mentor when I was at seminary, Bill Everett, now retired to the hills of North Carolina.

Our ship so safe, secure, a world lashed down,

Now shudders in the storm,

Washed with waves, roiling in the foam.

The clouds that shroud the beacon’s light,

The rain that pounds upon the rocks

Now soak us to the bone.

We steer by signals felt, not seen,

Strain to shores unknown.

Awed by the Life beyond our life

We row.

We pray.

Hear us.

Hear me.

Help us pray and row

to the last beating of our hearts,

Be heard and known by the Creator of the sea,

Be seen and rescued by the God of light.

Remember, three things, my friends:

1. God is in the changes that are happening; we may call them “unnatural” because of the human influence – but the whole system of earth’s climate is of God. God is in every moment. God is still speaking!
2. We may not have ultimate control, but God is with us! Continually offering choices, options, compassion, ideas, programs, hope...God invites us forward to that which could be. God is *alongside*.
3. In the meantime: For *God’s* sake, is we whistle in the dark alongside God, let us not forget to look at the brilliant color of the leaves, smell the autumn air, touch someone dear to you with a caress, taste some newly mashed cider and hear the geese passing over in their broad V’s.

Because the God of Light loves you.