

John Sampson

“Brotherly and Sisterly Love, A Celebration of Earth Day”

Text: 1 John 3:16 - 24

Preached at KVCC

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Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

Amen.

Today we celebrate Earth Day. And as we give thanks for all of the ways that our planet nourishes us, as we challenge ourselves to do better in our stewardship of the only home humanity has ever known, I am grateful to be sharing this time with three other voices. I'm joined in this reflection by Dan Plumley, Monique Clague, and Lura Johnson. Because the story we have to share is too big for one person to tell. It's too complex and too wonderful to be limited to

one voice, and so I am thankful for each of the other speakers volunteering to offer their experiences, and share with us their commitment to caring for the Earth.

And so I'll begin. I begin with this reading we just heard written in the name of John, one of Jesus' early followers. John opens his letter with love.

Love the force of attraction and relationship that overcomes all brokenness and fragmentation, which overcomes alienation and isolation.

Our tradition is a story about love and an invitation to love, to love between humans, to love between humanity and God. But today, on this Earth Day, it also offers us a chance to open our eyes and our hearts and our spirits a bit wider and see that our faith also invites

us into a deeper love between humanity and the Earth, the one many of us call Mother, the one many of us call holy.

And so today is a day in which we can think about writing a new letter, or offering a new prayer to the Earth, one that reconfirms our love for her, a letter that recommits ourselves to actions of love, and not just words.

I now invite Dan Plumley to share with us a love letter he's composed that reflects our thanksgiving for the great blessing that is the Creation. This prayer is both an expression of our love for the Earth, and a recognition of God's love for us manifest through the natural world.

[Dan Plumley speaks.]

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

That's the deeply challenging question that John puts to us this morning.

John is writing to his brothers and sisters in faith.

But we've heard of another kind of brother and sister this morning.

In the responsive reading we shared earlier Francis of Assisi introduces us to Brother Sun, and Sister Moon. He welcomes into our assembly, into our family, Brothers Wind and Air, Sister Water, and Brother Fire. And he opens our hearts and minds to honoring our Mother Earth. Francis reminds us that the world, and all of creation, are not simply resources to be used for our own need and

pleasure, but that they are sacred reflections of God. They are joined to us in the most intimate ways; we are family.

So let's listen again to the challenge that John makes to us, and let's hear it with the insight of Francis, and the truth of living here in the midst of this beautiful place we call home.

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees Brother Boreas or Sister Ausable in need and yet refuses to help?

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's greatest military power and the world's greatest economy and sees Brother Elephant or Sister Snow Leopard in need and yet refuses to help?

How does God's love abide in a people who have the most freedom and political clout the world has ever known and sees our brothers

without power in San Juan or our sisters in the mountains of Puerto Rico without water and yet refuses to help?

I now invite Monique Clague to share with us how she has seen the need of Puerto Rico and how she has responded.

[Monique Clague speaks.]

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

The first Earth Day was celebrated in 1970, in response to a devastating oil spill that occurred off the coast of California the year before. And now, in 192 countries around the world, today is a day when people regardless of race, religion or gender advocate for the health and well-being of our Mother, of our home.

The issues that we focus on today are challenges that began generations ago, and will take generations to solve. Climate change, clean energy, the protection of endangered species, food justice, and water rights, to name just a few, are all issues that have been with us for our entire lives. They will be issues for our children.

And so this letter from John, this letter of love, is a prayer that is addressed not only to us, but also to our children.

It's an invitation to the next generation to love, to love with words, but more importantly, to love with action.

And as Monique shared with us our children, our young people are responding. Our children are engaging with these seemingly intractable problems that impact our planet with passion and commitment.

I now invite Lura Johnson, who is a student at Keene Central School, to come and share her personal commitment to the environment.

And in today's bulletin is an insert with pictures from a trip Lura recently took to the Dominican Republic to build buildings out of recycled materials.

[Lura Johnson speaks.]

John ends the portion of his letter we heard this morning by saying that:

All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

We're told that we'll know that God's presence is with us by the Spirit that inhabits our lives, that lives within our hearts, and guides



our actions. We'll know that God is with us when we act in the spirit of love.

Today, on this Earth Day, Dan and Monique and Lura have shown us what love looks like. They've shown us how their lives have been guided and informed by a spirit of love for our planet. They've shown us how God's presence can inhabit our passions and our commitments to the environment, to our natural brothers and sisters, and to our human brothers and sisters.

And they're not alone.

I know that all of us are committed to loving the Earth more deeply and more broadly. And this love shows itself through our recycling, through our using more efficient appliances, by putting solar panels on our houses, and by the work of the Keene Clean Energy Committee. Our love is shown through the ways we advocate in our

community, and at the national level, for the continued protection of our world, even if it doesn't directly benefit us as individuals.

Protecting our world may seem like a nexus of political and economic decisions, it may seem rooted in science, but today, on this Earth Day, God invites us to remember that it is always, fundamentally, a question of love.

Amen.