

Luke 11:1-13

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say, Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial." And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.'" And he answers from within. 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.'" 'I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find, knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if you child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

"Watching Our Step"

One summer, while I was walking in the chapel of God's great out-of-doors, my first awareness of the Creator's sovereignty arose from the beauty of it all. I started to see the ways in which nature left its footprint on the earth as it was doing its own thing. The beavers, who were busy as beavers building their home, left a big dam footprint which extended across the width of the river. The hungry spider left an intricate web of artistic design. The hump back whale, while dining on Atlantic fare, left a large circle on the ocean's surface after showing off her magnificent tail. The fire ants left bulging mounds of dirt as rooftops upon the land. The flowers left

footprints of blazing color to enliven the soil. The tall trees left shade prints of protection under their limbs.

The Sovereignty of God is taught in Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. From a Muslim perspective, Yumus Negus explained:

The Qur'an tells us that everything that Allah has created in the universe completely submits to his will. So a rock is perfectly the rock that Allah commands it to be, the tree is exactly what Allah commands it to be, and wild animals such as the deer, the camel or the tiger are all exactly as Allah wishes them to be. Everything in creation is obedient to Allah in this way, no matter whether it is non-living like the air, the earth or the oceans, or living like the animals, the plants, the bacteria and the fungi. It makes no difference whether something is microscopic or immense. The particles of atoms and the massive galaxies of outer space are all obedient. And because each thing that Allah created is exactly as He wishes it to be, then everything in creation works properly and the whole creation fits together in a meaningful way. Creation is therefore sacred. The Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon Him, said: 'The whole of this earth is a mosque;' that is a place of worship.

(Cherish The Earth by Mary Low, p. 54)

In psalm 85, the Hebrew poet expressed the belief that when human beings, (a part of God's ordered creation), take their God given place in the natural world, they can leave footprints that give glory to God.

Surely God's salvation is at hand for those who fear him,

That his glory may dwell in our land.

... and will make a path for God's feet. (vs. 9, 13b)

That same summer, while hiking along a path on the tundra in the Rocky Mountain National Park, two signs claimed my attention. The first one was a simple request. **Please stay on the path.** The second was an explanatory one. **If you step on the plants along this path it will take over ten years for them to come back.** In an instant I became mindful of my big feet and the damage that my footprint could cause to the fragile ecosystem that the Sovereign Creator had woven together above the tree line where few could dwell. I felt like the enemy that the beaten down, down trotted community was

lamenting to God about in psalm 85. I was the trespasser, suddenly aware of doing more harm than good. Through the whisper of the wind I thought I heard the struggling flowers say: Your carbon footprint isn't fair! while the Earth complained: "Don't you know there are moral, ethical, and spiritual issues between us here?"

Restore us again, O God of our salvation! Revive us again!

In Jewish piety, when the community is oppressed by the enemy of injustice, they pray to God to save them by restoring justice. In God's realm, the first step of spiritual renewal is to make a confession of sin. In the opening verses of the communal lament the psalm made the connection between the well being of the land and nation with the acknowledgment of sin.

Lord, you were favorable to your land;
you restored the fortunes of Jacob,
You forgave the iniquity of your people;
you pardoned all their lives. (vs. 1-2)

In the book, *The Green Psalter: Resources for an Ecological Spirituality*, author Arthur Walker-Jones discusses the sin that is deeply embedded in the web of traditional Western Christian belief and practice.

In his criticism of western Christianity, White argues that, in its interpretation of Genesis 1-3, "No item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. And, although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God's image." Thus Christianity considered humanity separate from and superior to nature. "Especially in its Western form," he says, "Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen . . . in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), (it) not only established a dualism of man and nature but also invested that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends." On a popular level, many Christians think Christianity is about saving humans, and they have little interest in Earth because they are going to heaven. . . In discussions of environmental ethics, Earth has no intrinsic value. It is only valuable in so far as it is useful to

humans, who are viewed as separate from and superior to nature. In order to facilitate exploitation, Christianity removed spirit from nature. "In Antiquity, every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its own genius, its guardian spirit . . . Before one cut a tree, mined a mountain, or dammed a brook, it was important to placate the spirit in charge of that particular situation, and to keep it placated. By destroying pagan animus, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects" (p. 4).

Inasmuch as anthropocentrism and dualistic thinking that separates spirit from nature so as to devalue Earth is our confessed sin . . . forgiveness is the spiritual key for God's greening of Earth.

Loyalty and truth will meet, justice and well-being kiss.

Faithfulness will sprout from Earth,
and justice look down from the skies.

The Lord also gives what is good,
our Earth gives her produce
Justice will go before God
and will make a path for God's feet.

(Psalm 85:10-13 from *The Green Psalter*, Arthur Walker-Jones trans.)

Jesus taught his community to prepare for the coming of God's reign into Earth by praying: *forgive us our debts (trespasses) and as we forgive our debtors (those who trespasses against us)*. When vertical and horizontal forgiveness kiss, the steadfast Love of God transforms the community of faith into a bunch of eco-justice activists. With forgiveness comes the grace of trust. Trust that in our efforts to step lightly, with justice upon on Earth, God will guide, sustain, and uphold us in the footprints we make. In her reflection on forgiveness in the Jesus' prayer, Kate Huey wrote: *I fall into the trap of thinking that we can do it, that we are the ones who can get this world turned around and made right. I forget who's really in control. I forget that it is not our work, our task, but God's work, God's task and we are participants in that great work. I forget that it will not be our determination, our energy, our spirit that transforms this world, but God's Spirit and God's will that will bring about that transformation* (UCC 7/17/10).

Come, Holy Spirit, Come! Renew our faith! Thy Will be done!