

***“Founded in the Flow”******Psalm 24.1–6******The Rev. Hal Chorpensing, Plymouth Cong’l UCC, 7 June 2009***

One of the regular parts of my life has become an early morning walk behind my house, through Rolland Moore Park with my nine-month-old golden retriever, Chumley. Oftentimes, our cat, Chester, joins us for the full walk, which raises a few eyebrows as he trots along behind us. (Chester is under the impression that the whole of Rolland Moore Park is his backyard.)

There are things that I notice early in the morning when the only other people in the park are other dog walkers and a few tennis players – mostly athletic older guys who don’t mind the early hour. This week, with all of the rain, I noticed the fullness of the New Mercer Canal, which was nearly flowing over its banks. And I noticed the impact all of the precipitation has had on the field of various grasses that grow in the Ross Open Space behind my house, just south of the park, and it is stunning. The earth is fairly bursting forth grasses that will later be golden brown waves, but now are sea of emerald just beyond my back fence. The hills, too, have greened up in hues and shades of emerald that I don’t remember seeing here in Fort Collins. During the last week of May, my son Chris remarked as I drove him to Olander Elementary, that it was so green it almost looks like Ireland...but without the old buildings.

All of this greenness, when we take time to notice it, speaks of the fecundity – the fertility – of God’s earth. It called to my mind the twenty-fourth psalm: “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for God has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.” Sometimes at this point in the year, we are worried about drought, and the specter of forest fires is beginning to show itself. But, not this year. The water flowing around us reminds us of being nourished and cleansed by the gifts of God. The flow of God’s water is like the amniotic fluid in which each of us started life...buoyant, flowing...and like the waters of baptism... cleansing, flowing, welcoming.

But not all aspects of creation are warm and fuzzy. Nature is not always benevolent and calm. The Celts knew this and saw the untamed wildness of nature as being a reflection of the Spirit...it is bigger than we are, and it is God and nature that control us, not the reverse. The waters described in the story of Noah and the flood are certainly not the benevolent flowing waters of the still waters the psalmist describes. The wildness of nature was known far better in previous generations than it is in our own. In our culture, we are sheltered from the elements, famine, a huge range of diseases; to a large extent, we are protected from nature. But, there are still those among us who for a living or for recreation are in closer contact with the wildness of creation.

On the positive side, when I was serving a church in Kittery Point, Maine, I used to create a sermon by putting the week’s text in a Ziplock bag, strapping to the deck of my sea kayak, and going out for a paddle along the coast to pray about the passage. It was usually a joyful, life-giving experience for me, a way to open myself to God’s creation for inspiration. I never capsized and never saw anything more threatening than a harbor seal – though I always looked for dorsal fins. But, I also know that the ocean can be lethal. About 15 years ago, my stepbrother-in-law, an expert sailor who had been on the America’s Cup team, was lost at sea in Buzzard’s Bay while sailing with a friend. The waters and creation are life-giving and life-threatening.



Before the arrival of Christianity, the Celts in Britain and Ireland had a special reverence for springs and wells, thinking that they had special powers since they came from

the depths of the earth, the source of spiritual strength, and were associated with the water goddess, Danu, after whom the Danube and the Don Rivers were named.

And it wasn't just Celts. Meister Eckhart, the 13th-century German mystic refers metaphorically to God as a "great underground river."<sup>1</sup>

The early Celtic Christians encouraged a sense of continuity with the sacredness and healing powers of springs and wells, often rededicating them to a Christian saint, and today there are still holy wells active in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. British and Irish place names also still bear their imprint: Motherwell (dedicated to Mary the mother of Jesus), Bridewell (dedicated to St. Bride or Brigid), Tobermory (Gaelic for "Mary's Well" is on the Isle of Mull) or Holywell in Wales.

While I don't attribute curative powers to the water in these holy wells, I do find them to be sacred...not because of anything supernatural, but for two reasons. First, that they have been regarded by Christians and pagans before them for millennia as sacred places, and the power of thousands of years of prayer and devotion does tend to "rub off" on such places. Second, they are holy in the same sense that the Poudre and the Big Thompson are sacred. They are a source of living water that comes to us as a gift from God.

If God created the world and "founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers," we need to see them all as sacred. And if we see rivers and seas and lakes as holy places, as gifts from God, then we need to treat them as such, with respect, reverence, and protection. It's part of our role as stewards of God's planet.

For too long, Christians have seen the creation as something to be used and exploited, and that has been changing, but we still have a long way to go. Last month, I was part of a group set up by the City of Fort Collins to consider what the city and organizations within it can do about climate change. (And the group was facilitated by our own Michelle Betsill, who studies government response to climate change at CSU.) It's going to take American communities of faith, churches like ours, to take leadership positions as stewards of God's creation. You may not know that we pay for 100% of our electricity at Plymouth from wind-generated sources, but it's a stewardship commitment we made years ago, even though we pay a premium for our power.

If we take seriously that "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it," then it is incumbent upon us to put our belief into action. Do we postmodern Christians see creation as being founded in the flow of God's energy? Certainly, the ancient Celtic Christians did.

And the flow is not always as linear and predictable as perhaps we would like. It may seem random or unpredictable. The writer of John's gospel, quotes Jesus as saying, "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."<sup>2</sup>

We aren't always able to perceive the pattern of God's activity...where it comes from or where it goes, because God's wildness is so far beyond our comprehension. But, we do get to catch glimpses God's flow in creation and in humanity. An old prayer from the Hebrides in Scotland affirms the wildness of God: "Power of storm be thine, Power of moon be thine, Power of sun. Power of sea be thine, Power of land be thine, Power of heaven."<sup>3</sup> It is a good and humbling reminder to see the force of God in creation.

The great Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas, wrote, "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower / Drives my green age; ... / The force that drives the water through the

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<sup>1</sup> see Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing*. (Santa Fe: Bear & Co., 1983), p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> John 3.8

<sup>3</sup> from the *Carmina Gadelica*.

rocks / Drives my red blood.” The flow of creation is also the flow of humanity, and it is driven by the flow of the divine.

In the past ten days, I have stood over the lifeless bodies of two of our members – two vibrant people in the prime of life, in whom the movement of the Spirit had pulsed. Often when people die, you can perceive the flow of life slip away, and what is left is an empty shell. And I sense that our essence, our energetic flow, moves beyond our bodily existence. One way we can imagine the soul is as the divine flow within us, and that we are founded in the flow of God’s creative energy. And the flow of John’s and Laurie’s energy and love is still with us and all around us.

The ancient Celtic Christians spoke of being able to perceive God through “the little book and the big book.” The little book is our scripture, and the big book is creation. The basic idea is that God reveals God’s self to us all around us in nature and in humanity, if we only take a moment to open our eyes, our ears, our nostrils, our tongues, our hands, and our souls to let it soak in. It requires slowing down. It takes awareness and being mindful.

We cannot know God exclusively through scripture or through creation, but through both, we can experience the holy and create a collage that helps us perceive the divine in our midst.

May God be our guide and aid us as we flow through life. Amen.