

John 20:19-31 (NRSV)

Let us pray:

O Lord, I have no hope but in your cross. You, by your humility, suffering and death, have delivered me from all vain hope. You have given me all that is eternal in rising from the dead. Let me trust in you, in your love, everything else is just a whisper. Amen.

Imagine for a moment that you are one of the disciples. Go back in your mind over the events of the weekend that have just taken place. You have just lived through the most traumatic experience of your life as a follower of Jesus of Nazareth. On Thursday evening, there you were sitting around a table celebrating a meal before the Passover weekend. During the meal, Jesus had washed the feet of everyone around the table. After dinner you had gone to a garden with Jesus to pray. But Judas came with lanterns and torches and weapons and a detachment of soldiers, chief priests and Pharisees, and arrested Jesus and put him on trial before Caiaphas and then Pilate. He was condemned and crucified at a place called Golgotha on a cross between two others. How painful that was, to see your beloved friend hanging on a cross as a criminal! Racing through you were feelings of a profound sense of loss over the One to whom you had professed allegiance to the end. All hope seemed lost! If it wasn't hard enough to bear, one of the soldiers even pierced his side with a spear!

But wait!

Mary Magdalene had just announced that she had seen him alive that morning. She had gone to the tomb where his body had been buried, but reported it empty. In Mark's version of the resurrection, Jesus appeared to not only Mary Magdalene but also appeared in another form to two of the disciples as they were walking into the country. In Luke's version of the story, it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the Mother of James and other women with them who told the apostles! Hearing this Peter ran to the tomb; stooping down and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves, and he went home, amazed at what had happened.

How could that be?? We refuse to believe this miracle, this test to our faith. Was

it just grief causing us to see things? Remember that Death has its own set of emotions. We all believe we will live forever until we see one of our own hanging on a cross. At that moment each one of us comes face to face with our mortality. We as the disciples had forgotten one thing in all this. We had forgotten that the promise of the prophets and God's hope was still with us. In our despair we had lost that hope.

But suddenly Jesus appeared among them, saying "Peace be with you". When Jesus showed everyone in the room his hands and his side, we were stunned! We saw him hanging on the cross, and his body taken down and buried! This same Jesus had his side pierced by a sword, but now he was standing before us showing us the wound. No one lives through that experience, but our eyes are telling us otherwise. He is alive! Easter has happened at precisely this moment. The room is chaotic. Everyone is laughing and crying and shouting in their amazement and joy! Jesus is alive! The crucified one is the risen Lord. They are one and the same.

And then Jesus does something unbelievable. He once again says "Peace be with you" and adds "As the Father has sent me, so I send you". Saying this he breathes on us. "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Wow!

Now that is a moment not easily erased from our mind. Jesus transfers his vital life force from himself to his disciples. He is equipping us with the power to do his work. The Hebrew word for breath is *ruach*, but it also means life. Recall the first time the breath of God was transferred into a human being in the second chapter of Genesis. God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

What does it mean to us today to receive that power? With his breath Jesus didn't just empower the disciples 2,000 years ago. Just as they received the Holy Spirit and were sent, so are we. Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit into each one of us when we pray in his name. While the Resurrection may speak of grace to those who believe what does it mean to rest of humanity? Indeed, what it has to say is a message of Hope. If the Resurrection is to speak its word of hope into our world, then that hope must be incarnated in us. It is hope that will lend its voice to the voiceless whose basic human

rights are threatened.

What it says to us today on Earth Sunday is that the vital life force of the Holy Spirit is in all of creation. We are the ones called to witness Christ's resurrection power through our care for our earth and the environment. This is not a new thing. It is an idea as old as the scriptures. Beginning with the first chapter of Genesis, we learn how everything in existence was created out of nothing by God's word and breath, the *ruach*. When Israel finally inherited the Promised Land after wandering through the desert, God reminded the people that they were merely sojourners and strangers. The true owner of the land was God and the people of God were to be its stewards and caretakers, living in it by God's permission and grace. Most importantly, however, God had entrusted them with this creation and it was up to them to be good stewards of it.

Everything on our planet has its place and is related to everything else. Native Americans call this the web of life. When one part of creation suffers, it has ripple effects throughout the rest of creation. But we have forgotten that we are utterly dependent on God and on the interdependence with the rest of creation. We would rather stay in denial than see, hear and understand how our lifestyles affect our world. We buy and use products that pollute our air, land and water. As far back as the prophets Isaiah and Hosea warned: The land lies polluted under its inhabitants. The beasts of the field, the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are dying.

Care for the environment was the focus of one of the workshops I attended last month at a conference in Washington D.C. with 1,000 other men and women of faith from all over the country. We met there to advocate for the children of our nation, those who are among the voiceless because they aren't old enough to vote. The theme of Ecumenical Advocacy Days was "And how are the Children?" As I sat through an assortment of speakers it became clear that the issue of global warming was on everyone's mind.

Why it is so important to be aware of global warming? The scientific community warns us of the effects of an increase in the earth's temperature. As temperatures rise crop failures and agricultural changes in developing countries will lead to drastic changes in food production. We are warned that an increase in the earth's temperature

will devastate our planet with extreme weather. Rising sea levels will lead to mass population displacement as flooding, hurricanes and drought become more prevalent.

In his book “Collapse”, Jared Diamond wrote and I quote: “Even the richest, technologically most advanced societies today face growing environmental and economic problems that should not be underestimated. Many of our problems are broadly similar to those that many other past societies struggled to solve and some of those past societies failed, like the Norse of Greenland or the Maya of South America. It has long been suspected that many of these were at least partly triggered by ecological problems”. End of quote. We must continue to heed the findings of the broader scientific community as they reveal more about the greater climate system and changes that are taking place.

In a sermon this past Wednesday at Boston University I learned how the devastating effects of the increase to the earth’s temperature is affecting the glaciers. Glaciers are large masses of snow, recrystallized ice and rock debris that accumulate in large quantities. We can see the effects of glacial action on the summit of Mount Mansfield in Vermont. Global warming is melting the ice packs of the glaciers as the earth’s temperature continues to rise. An example of this can be found in Glacier National Park in Montana. In 1850 the park had 150 glaciers. Today only 26 remain. Another example is the Columbia glacier in Prince William Sound. Columbia glacier is sliding into the ocean at a rate of 80 feet a day. As these glaciers continue to melt our oceans will rise.

What scientists are saying is that this increase in the earth’s temperature affecting climate change is happening as a result of human-produced greenhouse gas emissions. What are greenhouse gas emissions? Many chemical compounds found in the Earth’s atmosphere act as “greenhouse gases”. Some of those occur naturally in nature while others are exclusively human-made, for example gases used for aerosols in hair spray, and spray paint. Since the Industrial Revolution, these gases have increased by 25 percent. In the U.S., most consumer greenhouse gases come from burning coal and oil to heat our homes and for electricity generation. Other consumer greenhouse gases

come from burning natural gas and petroleum used to power our vehicles. The U.S. boasts 4% of the world's population, but we produce 20% of greenhouse gases found in the environment. In order to prevent the earth's temperature from rising to alarming levels and resulting in catastrophic climate change, we must limit the increase in the Earth's temperature through emissions reductions. A step in the right direction is legislation aimed at industrial and commercial polluters. Did you know that Massachusetts became the first state in the country last month to sign into law a bill to reduce greenhouse gases in the environment?

Yesterday, tens of thousands of Americans gathered at more than 1200 rallies and events in all 50 states to ask our government to reduce carbon output by 80%. The group coordinating this national effort, Step It Up 2007, planned rallies outside churches, in our coastal cities, in cornfields and forests and on statehouse steps, all to call for action on climate change. The "One Earth, One Climate" Rally brought together people of all ages for a day of inspiration and hope. As part of the rally, children and adults formed a human chain across Boston Common to mark what may become Boston's future waterfront, if polar and glacial melting continues unchecked.

What can we do as a faith community to be good stewards of God's creation by lessening the effects of global warming? Remember that the created world was given to our ancestors and to future generations with the expectation that all people would care for it. First we must ask ourselves, how many planets does it take to sustain our life style? I recently found a website at www.myfootprint.org that will answer that question. The Earth day quiz on the website helps you understand how much nature you require to support the way you live. I was shocked to find that even dedicated as I am to recycling and fuel efficiency, it requires 2 and ½ planets to support my living habits. Many of us already turn down our thermostats at night and when we are away and replace the light bulbs in our homes and our workplaces with energy efficient bulbs. We are already recycling everything plastic and paper, and driving less and walking more to reduce carbon emissions into the air. I want to challenge you to go a step further in being good stewards of God's creation. Each one of us we must call on Congress to pass legislation necessary to ensure that our planet is protected from the

effects of global warming. Last month those of us from Massachusetts at Ecumenical Advocacy Days visited the offices of Senators Kerry and Kennedy in support of the four bills now in congress right addressing climate change. They are sympathetic to these issues but they need to hear from you!

Unless we speak up or act out, we must be prepared to face the consequences if we fail to take responsibility for our ecological future. In the end it will not be us who will have to live with the impacts of global warming; it will be our children and our children's children.

I want to go back now to this morning's scripture lesson again. Recall that Jesus breathed on the disciples his Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit power, a power that we literally breathe in every time we take a breath, we are witnessing to God who is our creator. We must never forget that the Holy Spirit lives in us. Our involvement in environmental issues is acknowledgment of this power. We are called first to love God and to show that love through our actions. It is up to us to be the voice that speaks up and acts out for the ecosystem. The reward for following the resurrected Jesus in this kind of discipleship is our lives.