

Children of the Earth

An Antiphonal Reading for Earth Day ~ April 22, 2018

Text: Psalm 24:1; Romans 8: 22-23a

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In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.¹

I have been in love with the sky since I was a child. And so I went to the sky and through the sky. I discovered in my time in space that humankind needs height primarily to better know our long-suffering earth; to see what cannot be seen up close. Not just to love her beauty but also to ensure that we do not bring even the slightest harm to the natural world. (Pham Tuan, Vietnam)²

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.

The earth at night looks even more magical than it does during the day. There is always a storm happening somewhere. Flashes of lightning sometimes cover up a fourth of the continent. At first, you see this as a natural disturbance, the eruption of splashes as a majestic spectacle. Aboard the spacecraft, it's quiet. The peals of thunder cannot be heard, the gusts of wind cannot be felt, and it seems as if everything is calm, simply a play of light. All of a sudden, you imagine that the lightening comes not from a natural storm, but from conflicts between people and nations. No! This must never be! Let only the northern lights and lightning blaze above our precious planet. (Vladimir Shatalov – Russia)

And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. God called the dome Sky. And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear."

As I looked down, I saw a large river meandering for miles, passing from one country to another without stopping. I also saw huge forests, extending across several borders. And I watched the extent of one ocean touch the shores of separate continents. Two words leaped to mind as I looked at all of this: commonality and interdependence. We are only one world. (John Bartoe, USA)

Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good.

From space, I see myself as one only person among the millions who lived, live and will live on earth. Inevitably, this makes one think about our existence and the way we should live to enjoy and share our short lives as fully as possible. (Rodlofo Neri-Vela, Mexico)

And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

I know that the stars are my home. I learned about them. I needed them for my survival in terms of navigation. I know where I am when I look up at the sky. I know where I am when I look up at the moon. It’s not just some abstract, romantic idea. It’s something very real to me. You see, I’ve expanded my home. (Eugene Cernan, USA)

And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.”

One morning we were flying over America and suddenly I saw snow, the first snow I ever saw from orbit. It blended with the contours of the land, and with the veins of the rivers. I thought – snow – people are busy getting ready for winter. A short while later we were flying over the Atlantic, then Europe, then Russia. I have never visited America but I imagined the arrival of winter in other places. And then it struck me that we are all children of the earth. It does not matter what country you look at. We are all earth’s children and we should treat her as our Mother. (Alexander Aleksandrov, Russia)

And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Looking outward to the blackness of space, sprinkled with the glory of a universe of lights, I saw majesty, but no welcome. Below and behind was a welcoming planet. There, contained in the thin, incredibly fragile shell of the biosphere is everything that is dear to us, all of the human drama of life. That’s where all the good stuff is. That’s where life is. We better protect it with all our might. (Loren Acton – USA)

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

Before I flew I was already aware of how small and vulnerable our planet is; but only when I saw it from space, in all of its ineffable beauty and fragility, did I realize that humankind's most urgent task is to cherish and preserve it for future generations. (Sigmund Jahn – Germany)

So God created humankind and God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

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¹ Biblical references are from the New Revised Standard Version.

² Excerpts from Space Travelers are taken from: Kevin W. Kelley (ed). [The Home Planet](#). Addison Wesley Publishing, New York and Mir Publishers, Moscow, 1988.