April 21, 2013
"Come On Outside"
Litany of Earth Centered Scriptures
F.U.C.A.
Rev. Karin Kilpatric

Today, we have been speaking about Mother Earth and all her blessings. We have talked about God creating the world, loving the world, and taking care of it. We have declared that God wants us to care for the earth as well. The words of the Bible have reminded us that if we pay attention to the plants and the animals they will teach us something about how to live rightly on the earth. The sun, moon and stars, the mountains, valleys, forests, rivers, and oceans all live according to natures laws and in harmony with each other.

When I was growing up I lived in a place that wasn't even a town. It was a spot along the road many miles from a city. My Dad was a doctor and my Mom a nurse and they moved our family out to this rural world, so they could provide accessible, affordable medical care to the people who lived there,

Our house backed up to the woods on a dead end road. When we were little, my sisters and I spent many of our days playing in those words. We wore paths between the trees. We made a clearing around our favorite big Oak tree, put a ladder up to its lowest branches and built a platform where we could sit up high among the dense leaves.

We pretended that an old tree stump, which had a hollowed out place in the middle where the wood had decayed, was our cooking stove and we gathered the bean pods that fell from the Locust tree and imagined they were the beans for our supper and we stirred them with sticks in the hollow of that tree.

There was a place called angel falls where the creek, more of a drainage ditch really, dropped down over a rock cliff, only a few feet high, but you could crawl under the cliff behind the water and watch it fall in front of you. There was a big tree whose

trunk grew at sharp angle to the ground and the brave ones would shimmy up the trunk as far as they dared. We called it the leaning tree.

In the spring we looked for the first tender wildflowers as they began to poke out of the winter leaves. One wildflower was named "Spring Beauty" and another, Dutchman's britches (because it looked like little Dutch boy white pants hanging out to dry) and another that looked like a tiny umbrella with a white blossom growing underneath it. You had to lift up the side of the umbrella leaves to find the flower hiding there. This one was called May apple.

During the summer we climbed trees and built forts and waded in the creeks and rivers and rode our bikes and camped under the stars with our friends. My Dad taught us to identify different birds by their birdcalls. Some of them had really funny names like Whip Poor Will and Chuck Will's Widow. On special hot, humid, summer nights Dad and Mom would load us up in the VW Beetle convertible, sometimes already in our pajamas, and we would drive out along the empty river road nearby. At a certain point Dad would stop the car and turn out the headlights and suddenly we could see millions of fire flies lighting up the trees which grew thick along the river bank.

Other warm summer nights, we would lie down in the grass in our front yard and look up at the stars. There were no streetlights around our house so the sky was filled with tiny sparkling lights. Some of the stars grouped together forming little pictures called constellations, that had names, like the Big Bear and the Big Dipper, and Orion.

In the fall we raked leaves into big piles and jumped in them and we built campfires and roasted marshmallows. In the winter we cleared a path down the hill through the woods, that we turned into a sled run when it snowed.

Growing up, we spent much of our lives outside and we had the sunburns, bruises, scratches, mosquito and chigger bites to prove it. We also had love and respect for the

natural world in which all of us live together under the vast canopy of sky.

Mom and Dad not only taught us about nature's wonders but they were also Sunday school teachers at our church. For me, there was never a conflict between nature's truths and wonder and those of religion. I grew up feeling deep awe toward both.

Tomorrow is Earth Day. The first Earth day was in 1970. It kicked off the Environmental Decade of the 1970s and contributed to legislation such as the Clean Air Act, the Water Quality Improvement Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Toxic Substances Control Act, and others. Another key development influenced by the advent of Earth Day was the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Now it is 43 years later. What the scientists have been claiming all these years is coming to be. Global warming is causing extreme weather conditions that have brought destruction of towns, and suffering to so very many people—especially the poor.

The Bible taught us to care for the earth. Jesus taught us to care for the least of these—for the poor and vulnerable. When we care for the earth we are also caring for its inhabitants, especially those who live in the vulnerability of poverty. The more the environment is abused the more the people on the margins of the world's economy suffer. An intergovernmental panel on climate change issued a special report in March of 2012, which was reported in the *Associated Press* with these words.

> Global warming is leading to such severe storms, droughts and heat waves that nations should prepare for an unprecedented onslaught of deadly and costly weather disasters… The greatest threat from extreme weather is to highly populated, poor regions of the world, the report warns, but no corner of the globe — from Mumbai to Miami — is immune….The Nobel Prize-winning panel of climate scientists forecasts stronger tropical cyclones and more frequent heat waves, deluges and droughts. The 594-page report blames the scale of recent and future disasters on a combination of man-made climate change, population shifts and poverty.

The cost of natural disasters on this greater scale has, in the United States alone,

risen from $3 Billion in the 1980's to $20 Billion in the last decade even after adjusting for inflation.

Forty three years, later, we need earth day more than ever. We need 365 Earth Days each year. We need to connect to this earth, our home, as we would to the brick or wooden structures we live in upon it. We need to be familiar with the earth's ways, receptive to its needs, proud of its beauty and strength as we are for someone we deeply love, our spouse or children or parents. That kind of love, or devotion, can work wonders—it will work to protect what is loved at any cost. Love for the earth felt as strongly as our love for our parents or siblings or children, would have unimaginable power to slow down the destruction of forests and oceans.

When we are truly devoted to something, it gives life meaning and purpose. We use the word devotion to speak about our relationship to God. And indeed any true and worthy devotion has a love of the divine, the eternal. within it. In prayer, we may look up into the heavens or bow our head toward the earth. Both are devotions to the sacred whole, grounding us and inspiring us, to live as we were meant to live. We two legged creatures can see this clearly if we will. Pick up your feet and put them down one at a time. Feel the solid earth that holds and sustains you. Now stretch out your hands and lift your eyes into the air. The mysteries and the possibilities invite your awe and attention. Human beings are made to live into this balance between heaven and earth. With attention to, awe toward, and trust in this glorious balance, harmony will come, indeed it is already here.

So Come On Outside.