

Chris Murphy  
February 25, 2024  
Scripture: Luke 6: 25-34  
Sermon Title: Reconnecting with the Earth

Prayer...

Introduction:

Today we are exploring the first chapter in John Philip Newell's *The Rebirthing of God*. He begins the chapter by introducing us to a part of the Holy Island of Iona called The ruins of the nunnery. Karen and I remember visiting this site when we went our own pilgrimage to Iona in 2006. Newell highlights that the ruins are contrasted with the restored Abby building on the island because the abbey has a roof and the ruins of the Nunnery have no roof. This is a reminder to Newell of how nature is like a grand cathedral with no roof.

When Newell goes to Iona he feels more of a desire worship in the ruins of the nunnery than in the Abbey. The Abbey is a reminder of masculine energy and the nunnery, which is open to nature reminds Newell of the Sacred Feminine.

Nature is the great cathedral. “The ancient Celts spoke of the cathedral of earth, sea, and sky. We have a stirring to pray in the natural cathedral of nature. According to Newell, at best our so called sacred sites like church buildings are side chapels that need to open onto the living sanctuary of the universe. Newell is more drawn to the great Cathedral of nature than to the small chapel of church buildings.

In our Scripture story today, we see Jesus also wishing to connect his disciples to nature. As he walks with them in creation, Jesus points out the birds of the air and lillies of the field. Jesus is reminding his followers to not worry and to put their trust in God. I recently came across two different devotions on this passage of Scripture written by friends of mine who are in ministry. Both of my friends who were writing on this story, suggest that maybe Jesus is not just using nature as a metaphor to make a point about peace and release from anxiety. They suggest that maybe Jesus really wants his disciples to look at the birds and at the flowers because as they spend time in nature they will experience peace. What if the truth is that God is trying to tell us that

being in nature is the key to experiencing rest and peace. What if nature itself brings healing to our lives because in nature we experience more directly the presence of God?

The deep truth of Celtic Spirituality and the teaching of Jesus is that in nature, in God's creation is the presence of God herself. We experience the Sacred Feminine through nature. We see this idea also in a beautiful movie musical that recently came out. Have you seen the new version of the Color Purple movie based on Alice Walker's novel the Color Purple. The book was written in 1982 and won a Pulitzer Prize in 1983. It then became a popular movie in 1985 that was nominated for an Oscar and starred Whoopie Goldberg, Oprah Winfrey, and Danny Glover. Later in 2005 the Color Purple became a Broadway musical and in 2023 it became a new movie musical starring the singer and actress Fantasia.

**Marcus Gardley – Screenplay writer for newest movie version of The Color Purple. Based some of the script directly from Alice Walker's book The Color Purple.**

**SHUG**

More than anything, God love  
admiration.

**CELIE**

You sayin' God is vain?

**SHUG**

Not vain, Miss Celie. God just  
wants to share a good thing. I  
think it pisses God off if you walk  
by the color purple in a field and  
don't notice it.

**CELIE**

You sayin' God wants to be loved  
like it say in The Bible?

## SHUG

Everything wants to be loved.

‘Specially God. That’s why God be

in everything. ‘Cause the more you

love what God made, the more you is

lovin’ God and God lovin’ you. God

be in music, water, in sunlight.

God be... big like the sky yet

small enough to live in our hearts.

The Color Purple movie and book remind us that God is revealed in nature. God is in nature and in our hearts.

According to Celtic Spirituality and the Color Purple we are invited to consider that nature has divine energy that brings healing to our lives because God is within her creation.

In all of John Philip Newell's books he likes to introduce us to famous historical figures who teach good theology. In the chapter on Reconnecting with earth, Newell reminds us that Julianne of Norwich, the 14<sup>th</sup> century mystic and anchoress says that we are made of God. He reminds us of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin who wrote that the fragrance of the feminine was in all things and that a reborn Christianity would be one where Christ would be viewed as a lover of the earth rather than a deserter of the earth. Newell also highlights that Thomas Berry was known as a modern theologian and prophetic voice who wrote that "we need to move from a spirituality of alienation from the natural world to a spirituality of intimacy with the natural world."

How do you relate to nature? Do you separate God from creation or do you see God within her creation. I grew up loving nature. For many years I was a backpacker and during college I worked at a camp each

summer, one time as the camp's nature director. For all of my life I have loved nature, but I grew up thinking of nature as separate from God.

Now through learning more about Creation Spirituality and Celtic Spirituality I believe within creation, within nature we experience the presence of God. John Philip Newell reminds us that seeing God within her creation is not pantheism. Pantheism is defined as nature being identical to God. What Celtic Spirituality teaches is what theologians refer to as pan-entheism. Panentheism is the idea that God is present in all creation, but not identical or limited to creation.

The significance is believing that God is within all creation is that this truth reminds us that when we connect to God's presence in nature, we connect to God relationally. The perspective that God's presence is within creation also helps us be motivated to care for creation, including to care for humanity, since we are part of nature not separate from nature.

The Church historically has encouraged us to relate to God through the Bible, through worship in church buildings, and through prayer. Celtic

Spirituality supports connecting to God in these ways, but also invites us to connect deeply to God through nature. Rather than emphasizing God being separate from her creation, Celtic Spirituality says that God is within her creation, therefore the deepest nature of creation itself is inherently good and divine.

I think the biggest takeaway from this chapter from me on reconnecting with the earth is that if I wish to deepen my relationship with God, I need to spend time in nature. The closer we are to nature, the more time we spend looking at the flowers of the field and the birds of the air, the healthier we will be spiritually.

What is wonderful about this perspective is that it also opens us to a new type of missional outreach in our Northwest culture. Oregon is full of outdoor people who love nature. By helping people connect spiritually to nature, we can help people be open to a type of faith that naturally feels sacred to them because something within them is drawn to God in nature. I wonder if the future spiritual communities will spend less time in buildings and more time in gardens and hiking trails or by lakes and



oceans. What if the spirituality of the future will be as much or more about gazing on a sunset than gazing on words in a book, even a holy book.

I love the Bible and I love singing worship songs, but I also love looking at the sky. The cathedral of nature is my favorite way to meet God and the chapel of churches is also beautiful. Church does not need to be in competition with nature. No church and nature can go hand in hand. We can celebrate the holiness of nature and the sacred sites like church sanctuaries. May we open to all that God wishes to show us. May we reconnect with the earth and meet God in a fresh way.

At the end of the Color Purple musical, we see a large family surrounding a beautiful tree. Without giving away the story, I can share that this Easter meal around the tree is an experience of great healing, forgiveness, and grace. What if nature herself is the key for us to experience deeper intimacy with God. What if the Sacred feminine shown in the beauty of creation is at the heart of the future of Christian Spirituality? AMEN.

## Matthew 6:25-34

### Do Not Worry

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink,[a] or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life?[b] 28 And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ 32 For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God[c] and his[d] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

34 “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.