

Sermon: "Gente del Tierra – People of the Earth"

By Rev. Laura Adelia 20 April 2008

When I was in seminary at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, CA, another new semester was starting. All of us students were talking about our new seminary classes with excitement as we sat around the tables having dinner in the dining hall. One young lady was sitting next to me and I asked her about her classes. With excitement, she said, "Oh, I am taking this one *really* cool class!" "Really?" I asked, "What is it?" She said, "It's called Earth Eco-Spirituality." I said, "Oh wow, that sounds interesting. What is it?" She said, "Well, we are learning about the spirituality of the earth, and the spirituality of the seasons, and you know, plants and planting seeds and the spirituality of it all..." "Hmmm" I said, "Sounds like gardening!" She shrugged and nodded, "It is."

OK, I know what you are thinking, today is Earth Day Sunday and she's going to do a sermon on ecology, global warming, or the environment ...or something of that nature. Right? But I'm not.

Not that those things aren't important, they are! It is that I feel we all have heard so much lately about these aspects from the media. Besides, what more can I say after the movie, "An Inconvenient Truth"? I mean, that about says it all!

But what I did want to talk a little bit about today is of course, the Earth. But not just our beautiful physical planet Earth, but all it includes; plants, animals, the land, and of course, the people of the Earth!

Today we have celebrated the Earth by listening to some wisdom readings from some of the world's religions and cultures. We have celebrated and honored the Earth by listening, singing, and drumming to some music from around the world. And we have celebrated and honored the Earth in our prayers, and even in a baptism!

What can we learn from the diversity and beauty of the many peoples of the Earth? Why should we learn about the people of the Earth?

We after all, are all 'of the Earth'. We are all part of the Earth. And we are all connected, whether we realize it or not. Everything we do affects another, even the tiniest action.

I am sure many of you have heard of the 'Butterfly effect'. You know, the theory that even the delicate flapping of a butterfly's wings can cause small changes in the atmosphere that later can greatly affect the weather in another part of the world. Oh I know some of you might be thinking, 'come on'! But look how much the tiny action of someone squinting their eyes at you can so greatly affect the way you feel! Yes! Tiny, but oh so impactful!

One of our readings today was part of the creation story in Genesis. God created the earth, and 'saw that it was good'. Think about that for a moment. Do you think the earth is good?

And in our reading from the Qur'an, it is written from the perspective of God, who says, 'I will create a vicegerent on the Earth'. In this passage God is creating the Earth and about to create a human to be a vicegerent. What's a vicegerent you may ask? Well, a vicegerent in this context means a 'caretaker', or a steward. So we as humans are meant to be caretakers of the Earth.

Every religion and culture has their creation story. In the creation stories of the Navajo and Hopi, we humans as well as everything come from *within* the Earth and emerged onto this world that we currently live in.

A while back I hiked Canyon De Chelly with a Navajo guide up in northern Arizona. Have any of you ever been there? It is magnificent, isn't it? We walked through the canyon, seeing all the wild red rock formations, each of them tied to their Creation

Story of *Estonetlahi*, the Changing Woman, the main female deity in Navajo spirituality and culture. It was amazing to see, each aspect of the canyon had a story. Changing Woman by the way, is also a symbol of the Earth. An appropriate name don't you think? The Earth is always changing. Including us humans!

On another trip, I visited Jordan and Jerusalem. One of the things that really amazed me, besides of course seeing many of the sights mentioned in the Bible, was when we took a drive down to Wadi Rum, in southern Jordan near the Saudi Arabian border. It is the place where they filmed the movie 'Lawrence of Arabia'. The Bedouins took us on their 4 wheel drive jeeps romping through the desert, their red checkered head dresses flapping in the wind. It looked so much like Navajo land; big red rocks, huge sand dunes, mountains, canyons. We stopped for a hike in a narrow canyon to look at some petro glyphs drawn by the ancient people who had lived there.

If I didn't know where I was, I would have thought I was back in Arizona looking at Native American petro glyphs! How similar they are! A totally different time, place and people, and yet so similar!

In fact, the more I continue to learn about people of the Earth, all our cultures, all our foods, all our varieties of music and religions, the more similarities I see than differences!

I know it is tough to step out of our comfort zone. But this church, Shadow Rock likes to challenge us to do so. It is tough to learn and sing new songs in another language from another culture! (Right Choir?) It can be scary to go up to a stranger who is another religion or culture and strike up a conversation or connect. We can feel pretty uneasy when visiting a different place of worship for the first time, or traveling to foreign lands. I know!! But if we can breakthrough that fear or uneasiness, the rewards can be great and we can learn so much!

The Holy land is not just in one geographical region ten time zones away in Jordan and Israel, the sacredness of the Earth is everywhere! It is right here!

Everything we do impacts another, from the most tiny to the most large. And everything we do, or don't do, will greatly impact the future of the Earth and those who live here after us. What kind of world, will we be leaving? When we all become ancient history, what will be our legacy?

How will we be viewed by people three to four thousand years in the future? When they are digging up our artifacts, what will they find? How will they "see" us? For example, when we say 'ancient Sumerians' what do we think of? Ziggurats, right? And ancient Egypt? Pyramids! But what about us? What will they find? Big box stores? Malls?

So I say, let us learn from each other. For the more we learn about each other, the more chance we have for understanding one another, and getting along...help create a better world, perhaps even contribute to peace on Earth! A lofty goal I know, but why not try? We are after all, in the hope business!

Let us take care of each other. Let us appreciate and respect each other! As the Lakota prayer said, 'Teach us to walk the soft Earth as relatives to all that live'.

In doing so, we will help take care of the Earth and our world, now and for the future, in all its vastness and beauty!

Namaste! Amen!