

Proper 5, Yr. A
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St. Stephens Episcopal Church
The Rev. Shari Young, Preacher

You remember last Sunday's Super Bowl? It certainly seems a long time ago at this point. We won't even talk about the game: Who here watched the half-time show? I am not a person who listens much to pop music but I have heard the name Bruno Mars a lot so I watched simply to learn who he is and what his music is about.

After the half-time show ended, my husband and I agreed that it was the best SuperBowl half-time show we had ever seen. Bruno Mars and his band were magnificent choreographed and dramatic singers and dancers and did a great set, but it was the staging that was a marvel. It was the production values that set this half-time show apart for us. It was not gimmicky and contrived like usual Super Bowl half-time show, but relied on a most creative use of lighting effects and atmospherics utilizing the stage, the performers, and the entire stadium as a canvas. It was very well-done

At the show's conclusion I went into our kitchen to get something to drink, and as I entered, I saw through the windows that an enormous number of birds were streaming southward right near the house. One of the things I love about our house is that we are on a flight path for geese when they migrate south and I love to stand outside and hear them honking as they pass overhead. I thought that's what I was seeing.

I quickly went outside and up on our deck which overlooks the north bay. The birds that were passing overhead were not geese, but gulls. There were thousands and thousands of them and move coming in a huge wave of squawking seagulls. It was late afternoon, and there was a cloud filled winter sky and the pink light of sunset was reflecting off them. It was beautiful and crisp.

The tide of birds was an utterly magnificent scene. The gulls kept coming and there were thousands and thousands of them sweeping in a big expansive vortex across from where we live, over Paradise Beach Park. It is been herring season, and something told the gulls to come at that particular moment and to dive into the Bay there at the park to get a mouthful of baby fish. The loudest sounds of squawking came from down by the water where birds were diving, diving, diving.....

In that moment, at that particular point in time on a Sunday afternoon in February, I realized that I had seen the best of two worlds: The natural world of clouds, and birds, and ocean, and fish, with its astonishing beauty and sights and sounds; and the world of American pop culture with its technological wonders, and entertainment marvels, and music and dance, and athletic prowess.

It seemed to me to be a metaphor for where we as human beings stand as a civilization: between our planet earth and its myriad interdependent life systems of which we are an integral and unique member, and our super sophisticated futuristic society with its ever expanding technological wonders.

“Earth and Altar,” is our parish focus this year. The intent of Earth and Altar is to draw our attention to our relationship to each other and to the natural world, to Earth.

The mission statement is on the cover of the service bulletin
“An active exploration of our relationship with God, earth, and one another

Earth and Altar to me is an encouragement to renew and deepen our relationship to earth, our source and our sustenance. Like a marriage that has become routine, our call is to fall in love again with the beauty and the gifts of earth, and to renew our gratitude and care.

To heighten our mindfulness of soil and plants, and food and where it comes from, and of those who are hungry. To be grateful for the air we breathe, and the water we drink, and to pay attention to its source and quality..... not only for ourselves but for others.

We are not separate from earth, we are intimately connected to the earth. We are in, and of the earth.

In our creation myth in Genesis, the first human is **Adam**. A-dam: The name “Adam,” comes from the Hebrew word ‘adamah’ which means earth. Its common meaning is “human.”

We are made of the dust of the earth, of the dirt. “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust:” This is not something harsh, it is a statement of our essence. The dirt of earth is stardust; made of atoms created with the sun 4 billion years ago. We are of the stuff of earth; stardust.

Eve in the creation myth was created next. The first woman: Eve. Her name in Hebrew is derived from a root word in Hebrew which means “to breathe” and “to live.”

+The gospel says we are the light of the world and the salt of the earth. These are images that ground us in the physical world and speak to our vocation on this planet.

The salt of the earth. The use of salt is ancient and widespread. It brings out the taste of food. Up until recent times salt was very valuable. Some cultures exchanged salt as money; the earliest roads were built to transport salt, the earliest taxes were levied on salt, whole military campaigns were launched to secure salt. Salt gave Venice its start as a commercial trading empire in Europe, and it helped Gandhi bring India to independence in the mid-twentieth century.

We are the “salt of the earth. We are valuable and essential. We *are* the salt that adds tastiness to lives around us.

Light of the World:

To live in the light means to live in honesty, pure and simple. To be transparent, to heal any parts of ourselves hidden as a dark secret. To be a light in the world means not only light to other human beings, but a light to the plants and animals and minerals.

As Edith Wharton wrote

“There are two ways of spreading light in the world: Being a candle or a mirror that reflects it.”

Neither salt nor light exists for themselves. They only fulfill their purpose when used, poured out.....

In the place between our high tech culture and its marvels; and the astonishing richness and beauty of the earth in which we are grounded..... is our unique vocation and calling. To be light and salt, healers and peacemakers, in our own individual way and as a community; the community of St. Stephens.