

For a prelude, Glenna played soft music while this NASA video showed images of ocean currents from space. You might want to check it out here: <https://svs.gsfc.nasa.gov/10841>. It's the second image from the top, and runs for 3:02". It has its own music, too!

Depth Charge

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14th Sunday after Pentecost - September 11, 2022

Texts: Job 38:1-18, Luke 5:1-11, Psalm 104

Job 38:1-18

God answered Job out of the whirlwind: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy? Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?—when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped'?"

Psalm 104:24-26

O Lord, how manifold are your works!

In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.

There go the ships, and Leviathan
that you formed to sport in it.

Luke 5 :1-11

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were

partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Your word, our light; your grace, our hope; your love, our life. Thanks be to God.

Some little girls never really bond with dolls. I was one. The first one I owned was a rag doll I named Blue Baby. I gave her a bath and that was the end of Blue Baby’s



career. Then for Christmas I got one of those molded plastic dolls with opening and shutting eyes. I named her Merry Gentlemen. What I really wanted was an airplane, so I tied a string around her neck and made her fly. I believe her head came off. The third and final doll I owned came with a name, Nanette, a frilly pink dress, and strict orders from my parents to treat her gently. She never left the shelf. I guess she died her own kind of death - of benign neglect.

I don’t believe that I was lacking in imagination or compassion; I loved to gallop my herd of plastic horses across the Great Plains of my bedroom floor. And when my baby sister arrived - I was five at the time - I was enchanted. I would stand for hours next to her crib, just watching her sleep, with an awe that bordered on worship. Having heard about my track record with the fake babies, you may find it remarkable that my parents let me anywhere near her. But I would have defended her with my life!



A good psychoanalyst or therapist would probably have a field day with my treatment of the dolls I owned, but the truth is simple: they just never came alive for me.

I wonder if a similar failing accounts for so much that is wrong in the world? My friend Kara, a pastor, says the problem is that we have forgotten that we belong to one another. Belonging is different than owning. Belonging means caring for, tending to each other’s needs, valuing one another. Seeing one another as equally alive, fueled by the same longings and desires I have. Being gentle with one another, as we should be gentle with ourselves, too.



Some humans (not all) have adopted an unfortunate attitude toward the natural world. We treat the earth like we own it, not as though we belong to earth, and earth to us. We don’t see it as truly alive. Oh, we may love the lake where we go to relax or the garden in our backyard, but as a whole, earth and its fullness are objects for us to use. Where did we get that idea? Certainly we didn’t learn it from the Bible, which loves to depict nature as full of life and personality: trees clap their hands, the mountains sing for joy, the sea and all that fills it roar in praise of God.



Early biblical texts borrow some images of creation and the sea from other Ancient Near Eastern cultures, where the sea is personified as a monster to be slain by the hero - a glorious tale, and worth a closer look some other time. Until recent years, our view of creation was kind of like that: the natural world was viewed as something to be dominated, subdued, controlled. The ocean was dangerous and violent - beautiful, of course, but threatening to human life. The Bible changes this. Contrast that with our reading from Job, where an easily

all-powerful God acts as midwife to the newborn sea, catching it as it comes from the womb, swaddling it in clouds and darkness, holding it tight. Or in the psalm, where the chaos monster Leviathan is re-imagined as quite a sporty fellow, made for God's delight, to frolic in that same sea. Visualize the joy of whales! (Orca is pictured)

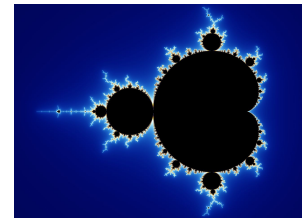
Today, in our exploration of the care of creation, we look particularly at waters of the earth: oceans, yes, but also at lakes and rivers and ponds and trout streams. I was saddened to learn of two major fish kills in recent days: In the San Francisco Bay, thousands of dead fish mount up on



beaches due to a "red tide" algae bloom probably caused by climate change and human waste runoff¹. In late July, 2500 brown trout died around the corner from us, in Rush Creek. Also due to runoff of agricultural toxins.² Or I think of the

outlawed but still practiced form of blast fishing: essentially detonating a depth charge to catch a lot of fish at once, in the process destroying coral reefs and habitat.³ Dead fish, dead sea, can't praise God, or help people. Have we forgotten we belong to each other, and that all of us belong to the One who made us? All living things are precious to God, not to be casually destroyed,

Back in the ancient history of the 20th century, about the same time that the earliest environmental prophets started warning about the dangers of climate change, mathematicians and meteorologists began to look deeper into recurring patterns in nature. They discovered that there were complex dynamic systems (like waves or winds) that followed rules that were unpredictable - but reliable. And that everything - truly everything - is connected. They called it *chaos theory*; you may have heard the saying, "If a butterfly flaps its wings in the Brazilian rainforest, a tornado will hit Texas." I don't pretend to understand it, but what I do know is that this theory reveals the astonishing beauty woven deep into



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<https://www.npr.org/2022/09/08/1121865515/thousands-of-dead-fish-are-covering-bay-area-beaches-after-red-tide-hits-region>. September 8, 2022.

² <https://www.postbulletin.com/sports/northland-outdoors/fish-kill-decimates-trout-in-rush-creek-near-rushford>, August 2, 2022.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blast_fishing

creation. One example is the Mandelbrot set: with computers they could pursue a type of equation that describes natural phenomena like the turbulence of the sea, looking deeper and deeper, to see the pattern unfolding in something that always looks to me very like paisley:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/transcoded/2/25/Progressive_infinite_iterations_of_the_%27Nautilus%27_section_of_the_Mandelbrot_Set.ogv⁴

What does this have to do with a little girl who wasn't into dolls? I think it's about what we're able to recognize as alive and connected. My dolls were just things; my sister was breathing and growing and developing. It was clear that she belonged to me and I to her in ways that my lifeless dolls didn't. She had an infinite depth then, and still does. Both my sisters do. So do you!



So you know what I love about our Jesus story today? He told the disciples to go deep. “Put out into the *deep* water and let down your nets for a catch.” Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.⁵

I don't believe that human beings are really lacking in imagination or compassion. But I do think we've grown superficial; we treat one another and the earth as objects to use. Maybe this is why the world seems chaotic at times: Christianity seems to be floundering. Jesus promised the disciples they would catch people, and they did - but right now, our nets seem to come up empty. Maybe we need to heed Jesus' advice to go deep, to ask more profound questions about *how* it is that we all belong to each other, *how* we can respond to the real needs of real living people, how we can all treat one another more gently and be like him in our love.

The earth seems to be in chaos, too. We're in danger of reaching an environmental tipping point from which there will be no return. We don't have all the answers yet, but can we go deeper in our questions? Can we ask the earth herself: how is it that you are as alive? Oceans and rivers, lakes and streams, how can we live with you and alongside you to our mutual benefit?

Who knows? We may be amazed by what we learn. Because I do believe that the Maker of *all* things will not let *anything* go easily. Like nature herself, God may be unpredictable, but God is ultimately reliable, and brings beauty and order out of chaos. Amen. TBTG

⁴ Creative Commons, Wikipedia, “Mandelbrot Set”

⁵ Image: Koenig, Peter. Draft of Fishes, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=58852> [retrieved September 10, 2022]. Original source: Peter Winfried (Canisius) Koenig, <https://www.pwkoenig.co.uk/>.

Prayers

Creating God, your fingerprints are visible on every beautiful, quirky, useful, and awe-inducing thing, from seas to stars, and ants to mountains; your Spirit breathes life into every being and into the planet itself. Help us to set aside ownership and cultivate partnership with the earth, because you have made us to belong to each other.

We pray for every injured and hurting part of the planet: from beaches covered with rotting fish to charred and smoking forests, to a threatened nuclear plant. Help us to recognize our role in causing the damage.

We call to mind all the individual hopes and fears of those we value most dearly, and trust that you are not too great and mighty to offer care and comfort to them. Our hearts go out to all who mourn, whether they have lost a queen, a family member or friend, or a beloved pet, or a home. We are all connected. Remember us with tenderness as we pray:

Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver, Source of all that is and that shall be, Father and Mother of us all, Loving God, in whom is heaven: The hallowing of your name echoes through the universe! The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world! Your heavenly will be done by all created beings! Your beloved community of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth. With the bread we need for today, feed us. In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us. In times of temptation and test, strengthen us. From trials too great to endure, spare us. From the grip of all that is evil, free us. For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN Healing Is Flowing, Deep in the Waters (*Tune: Morning Has Broken*)

Healing is flowing, deep in the waters,
Healing is breathing, making flesh whole;
All through creation, God sends forth waters,
oceans of healing, for all the world.

Healing is rising, fresh with the morning,
healing is rising, bursting with grace;
Christ, as you surge from deep in creation,
heal Earth's deep wounds and rise in this place.

Healing is breathing, life from the Spirit,
healing from Eden, flowing from old.
Breath of the Spirit, blow through our churches,
Come heal our people, body and soul.