

Easter 3/Creation Care Sunday

Acts 9:1-6

Revelation 5:11-14

John 21:1-19

## Do You Love Me?

The news a couple of weeks ago was an odd blend of the ridiculous to the deadly serious. On the ridiculous end, before he even picked up a club, there was the endless speculation about how Tiger Woods would fare at the Masters Tournament in Augusta, Georgia. Then there was also Virginia Governor Robert McDonnell who declared April to be Confederate History Month without mentioning slavery. He did apologize several days later, probably after it became pretty clear the issue wasn't going away.

Towards the middle of the scale there was the release of the new Apple iPad, which had relatively affluent people who most likely hadn't camped in years, spending the night on sidewalks around the country to be among the first to purchase the sleek, albeit expensive, device.

But while all those things in a normal news week probably would have gotten even more coverage than they did, it was not a normal week. The explosion at the upper Big Branch Coal Mine in Montcoal, West Virginia, had many of us glued to our television sets.

Along with the horror of what had happened, there is something about being trapped deep underground in a mine which taps into our most primal of fears. Even people who are not normally claustrophobic, get very uneasy even thinking about it.

A couple of years ago, I remember seeing Randal McCloy, the sole survivor of the 2006 Sago Mine disaster, which killed 13 men, after he was released from his long and difficult stay in the hospital. My back was initially away from the television and his tone of voice sounded very positive and upbeat so when I turned around to look, I expected to see someone who appeared happy.

But what I saw instead stunned me. While he was clearly glad to be home, Randall looked like a man who had seen and endured more than any human being should ever have to. He was smiling, but his eyes were haunting: deep set and full of grief.

Two weeks ago, I saw similar looks in the eyes of the people of Montcoal, especially while they held out hope, slim though it was, that the 4 unaccounted miners might still somehow be alive.

Mining is a way of life in that community and has been as long as anyone can remember. Mining families know the work is dangerous, and their stoicism in the face of this danger, is almost a point of pride. People don't become coal miners because they love the work, they do it so they can support their families in the best way they know how, especially in impoverished areas. These are strong people and they work hard.

But as the reality and scope of the explosion became increasingly clear, efforts, their stoicism slowly began to be replaced by deep grief, underscoring the fact real men died there with real life stories: men still in their late teens with their whole life ahead of them, men with families, men who coached high school sports, men who had been miners all their lives, including one about to retire. This was to be his last trip down.

They were men who died doing something which makes our way of life possible.

Their deaths remind us that the choices we make about maintaining or even improving our way of life matter because they can have consequences which exceed our immediate concerns.

Because this is the first day of Earth Week, (Earth Day is this Thursday) and the Earth Day festival is today across the street in Balboa Park, we decided, to designate this Sunday as Creation Care Sunday. It presents us with an ideal time to think about those consequences.

Environmentalism is clearly a hot button issue, including for many in the church. But just because it's controversial does not mean we shouldn't engage in the issues it presents. The fact it is controversial should actually compel us to take a good look at these issues, because if people get worked up over them, chances are they are important.

And as people of faith, it is particularly important we look at them because if there are human consequences to the decisions we make, it is a good bet there are spiritual consequences as well. As much as I love our liturgy, whether or not people bow at certain times during the Eucharistic Prayer is probably not going to change all that many lives. How we take care of each other and the earth will.

And the reading from John's Gospel we just heard, gives us a good framework for thinking about these things.

It is Jesus' final appearance to his disciples after his resurrection. Peter and some of the other disciples decide to go fishing. They are not terribly successful at catching anything until Jesus appears and directs them. Once back ashore the disciples see that Jesus has prepared a charcoal fire to cook the fish and they share a meal together. In an odd way, it could not be a more normal scene: it's just breakfast on the beach.

But, its importance becomes clearer afterwards when Jesus takes Peter aside and walking with him, asks three times "Do you love me?" followed by the instructions, "feed my lambs," "tend my sheep," and finally "feed my sheep."

Most of a life of faith involves normal stuff—being with family and friends, having meals, going to work, maybe even going fishing, and hopefully spending time with Jesus. But as we go about our normal lives, we can be sure Jesus is asking us the same questions he asked Peter, "do you love me?" And if we say yes, the instructions will be the same: "feed my lambs," "tend my sheep," "feed my sheep."

They provide us the criteria by which we, collectively and individually, may know if we are living the life Jesus would have us live.

So for instance, using reusable bags is touted as a good way to be "green" thing. And it is a very good thing to do. But creation care is not just about using the bags. It is about honoring the whole of creation, so we don't make decisions to so much engage in individual actions but instead live our lives in a way which honors what God has given and entrusted to us.

So we use reusable bags because they cut down on the need for excessive mining or drilling of our natural resources. We use them to help cut down on the degradation of our environment, in particular our air, soil, and water so people can live in their neighborhoods without unnecessary and at times, unconscious exposure to toxic chemicals. We use them so the earth can continue to fully support and sustain not only us but those who will come after us.

Creation care then is being conscious of the consequences and implications of our actions. Our electricity does not come magically into our homes, but in part through the efforts of people like those who died in the Big Branch mine.

So, creation care behooves all of us to do what we can to make sure such accidents do not happen

again *and* at the same time, seriously address the need for developing power sources that won't be so detrimental to people and our environment.

Ultimately, creation care is to not waste or take for granted the great gift God has given us.

Father Thomas Berry, considered by many to be one of the foremost thinkers on the issue of ecology and spirituality, put it this way beautifully:

*As humans we are born of the Earth, nourished by the Earth, healed by the Earth. The natural world tells us: I will feed you, I will clothe you, I will shelter you, I will heal you. Only do not so devour me or use me that you destroy my capacity to mediate the divine and the human. For I offer you a communion with the divine. I offer you gifts that you can exchange with each other, I offer you flowers whereby you may express your reverence for the divine and your love for each other.<sup>i</sup>*

We are Easter people. We believe in resurrection. And to believe in resurrection means we believe life is more than the actual days and nights we live upon this earth. By and through the grace of God, may we always recall and follow Jesus' instructions: feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my lambs.

**The Rev. Canon Allisyn Thomas**  
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<sup>i</sup> Thomas Berry, "Evening Thoughts," *Evening Thoughts, Reflections on Earth as Sacred Community* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2006), p. 139.

