

The Earth Was Strangely Warmed
May 1, 2011

There are several globes on the communion table

Romans 8: 18-27—or 28

(Paul names the earth’s groaning, but urges all to hope!)

[There are four persons standing up front, each with a music stand and on each stand is a large-print phrase, which will name their “position” as follows (These positions are also named on the video screen.)]:

I. “We Won’t Change; We are Doomed”

II. “We human beings are Warming up to act care-fully”

III. “God Will Warm up us Humans”

IV. “God Will intervene to Cool the planet, to make things good.”]

Liturgist reads Romans 8:18-27 and remains standing, as if finished.

IV: (looking to Liturgist) You forgot a verse—you didn’t read verse 28. That’s a very important verse.

Liturgist: Oh, glad to: “**We know that all things work together for good** for those who love God.” [Liturgist sits down; Carolyn stands up at pulpit.]

IV: Thank you. That verse is the most hopeful thing Paul writes in his whole letter of encouragement to the Romans. “All things work together for good.”

III: I agree. It gives us hope that **God will warm human hearts** to care for the earth in time to save it.

II: **God is already warming our hearts!** Look at us today. We’re working right now to help our earth heal from the consequences of our human selfish ways.

I: What are you all talking about? **Warmed hearts?** It’s the earth that’s warming up.

Carolyn:

I think those hopeful three to your left are talking about what we call our “heart-warming” experiences—times when something melts in us, and we stop beating ourselves up with guilt, or we stop having so much anxiety about the future. We trust God, the God of love.

III: **God will warm our hearts**, just like God warmed up John Wesley’s heart.

Carolyn: In case anyone has missed this famous story in the Methodist Church, John Wesley—the founder of Methodism—had been very worried about what he called his personal salvation. Then this event occurred, as he wrote: “In the evening I went very unwillingly to a Society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the *Epistle to the Romans*. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ. Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”¹

IV: Wesley became convinced that God loved him, and from then on, he was not preoccupied with his sin any more.

II: In England, that night, Wesley realized that we humans live “under the law of love,” not the “law of sin and death.” We can live with hope, not guilt.

- IV: We can trust that God so loves the World that God will save the world. God *will intervene* to cool the earth. Maybe God will stop the Arctic ice from melting, or God will replenish the rainforests, or . . .
- III: Or, God so loves the World that God will intervene to *warm human hearts* in the nick of time.
- II: It IS the nick of time, now, and we humans *are* changing our ways. Look—God has already warmed *our* hearts—and our brains, and hands, and feet. *We can* be confident because we are taking actions for the good of the earth, right now. Look at all we are doing: we’ve finally got it!
- I: What planet are you living on? There’s too much warming going on, and it’s not in our hearts. Maybe some people, some companies, some governments, and some churches are becoming more earth-friendly, and some rivers are cleaning up here and there. But the problem is huge, and we in wealthy countries have not *even begun* to be *worried enough* about our sinful ways.
- Carolyn: That’s a good point. John Wesley’s heart was warmed so that he felt God’s love *only after* he was preoccupied with his own sin. We who say we are living in “developed countries” barely admit how much we are destroying our planet — we’re definitely not preoccupied with what we’re doing to ruin the earth for human habitation.
- IV: I would rather not dwell on the problems. It makes me depressed, and I cannot enjoy my day. If I stayed informed about all the Global Erratic Climate Change, I wouldn’t be able to enjoy my life *the way it is*. I would rather trust that God will save the earth. Surely, an all-powerful God can do that.
- III: An all-powerful God could at least help humans to do what is right. *We are* the hands and feet of God, but God moves our hands and feet.
- I: God didn’t make us puppets on strings—We have free will, and we’re using it a little too freely.
- II: We’re clay in God’s hands, and God is *already remodeling* us.
- III. People care in some parts of the world; some people here are definitely reducing, reusing, refusing, . . . Much exploration is going on for many kinds of energy that are earth-friendly. You know, it’s the “butterfly effect,” when a butterfly flaps its wings in China there are ripples in Redlands, and visa versa.
- IV: God sees the whole picture and will come to the aid of us humans, even if we don’t all act wisely.
- II: One wise act by an earth-friendly company or individual in India may make a difference for the earth, but it also helps to warm us all up to more wise action. Humans supporting each other to do what we know we should is snowballing, it’s working.
- I. This snowball effect is not happening anything near fast enough. The snowball will melt before enough humans make connections between our every day behaviors and their effects on the earth. It is *true* that our using solar energy instead of oil actually saves land, that our choice to buy vegetables and hamburgers that are not packaged actually adds longevity to our planet.
- Carolyn: Now you’re getting personal. It’s tough to avoid packaging, to use real cups, not paper ones, to coordinate car-pooling . . .

I: Global Erratic Climate Change may seem like an issue that's way up in the clouds somewhere, but it IS PERSONAL.

II: Might the letter to the Romans help us? Hearing it somehow helped John Wesley that April night in England—maybe Paul's words even helped the Romans.

Carolyn: Paul was deeply moved by his sense that the earth itself suffered. He pointed out that it was not creation's fault that it suffered. As short as it is, this passage is the only place Paul talks about what he means by "salvation." Notice, he does not speak about individuals being "saved." Paul's vision of salvation is for the whole world—or not at all.

Everyone (I, II, III, IV): We can all agree on that—salvation is for the whole world—or not at all.

IV: We're all in the same boat.

III: Well, on the same earth.

II: Where do we stand, then? In what can we place our hope? Or, *dare* we hope for a promising future for humankind on earth, whether in England, China, or North America?

Carolyn: Paul talked of the "groaning of creation" as "common knowledge," though he was able to hold onto enormous hope. He knew that hope was not the same as sight—Hope is still speculative. He hoped he was right to have hope in the future.

I: Some of our "common knowledge" about Climate Change is on this bulletin insert. mlcp[Hold up] I bet most of us will just skim over the words and not do much to change our ways. We're not as passionate about our guilt as Wesley was or as worried about our salvation as Paul was. We want today's comfort more than we want to save the earth for our great great grandchildren.

II: With all due respect, I think you're wrong. Look at these people. Don't they look as if their hearts are already warmed? They are part of God's solution. I bet every person here today will change at least three specific behaviors to help save the earth. I'm going right home and change the rest of our light bulbs to long-lasting earth-friendly ones. I'm going to actually use my reusable cup when I go to Starbucks. Paul spoke in this passage as having been saved—he used past tense! God warmed Paul and Wesley and is now warming up Linda, Suzi, Bob, Bill . . . [Look, or gesture to these others, or substitute other names]

IV: I have hope that God will find a way to cool the earth, to calm the climate. But it doesn't hurt for me to read this insert, I guess. [Hold insert up] Not that I really *want* to know what it says. I get overwhelmed with the problem. I am only one person; surely it can't matter much what I do. It matters so much more what God does to solve the problem. *Frankly, I'd rather Earth Day go away.* But I do NOT want the earth—or humans—to go away!

III: Hope is important for all of us Christians. Hope is in the whole process.

[II begins taking one earth at a time from the altar handing them to people in the front row, maybe tossing the blown-up globes. II. leaves ONE EARTH on the altar. Everyone else stands, carefully observing II, not speaking. When II's done, II stands in place again.]

I: What are you doing?

II: We have only one earth. That's all we need, because we are now responsible people,

taking action, making stands, behaving as if God has already warmed us up to love the earth with passionate care.

Carolyn: Neither John Wesley nor Paul were *certain* that all would be well, but they gave up anxiety about the process and were filled with God's love because they were part of the solution.

II, III, IV: So are we!

I: I hope so.

¹ It is a diary entry in the year of 1738. John Wesley's heart had been troubled; then it was strangely warmed. Had he achieved the "gift of salvation" of which he spoke so often? Had he achieved a state of sanctification that would become such a part of his message and ministry? Whatever happened, Wesley found an assurance of God's love that had escaped him until that moment of his Christian journey. The journey was, metaphorically and literally, mysticism and Moravians, spiritual disciplines and Savannah. It was a long process that had brought him to Aldersgate Street that April evening.