While studying at George Fox Seminary in the mid 2000’s I shared a class with a young man who was preparing to do his doctorate. He planned to do his dissertation on God’s true intentions for the earth and all people. I have never followed up on whether he finished his studies, but I remember how passionate he was in protecting the earth from harm, and how strongly he felt that God’s people were chosen to be caretakers of the earth. He desired to showcase the goodness of God in all things, but his main focus was to show how our worship of God is also a window into our soul on how we treat our planet, how we engage with people, and how we find joy in sharing our bounty.

During the next 4 Sundays we will be focusing on the unique nature of our planet, the amazing mystery of life on our planet and the bond we have with Earth as our precious home. You will notice certain themes throughout: In our call to worship we invite all the domains of Earth to worship with us. In the readings, we discover the story of Earth being born in Genesis One, we hear how the Word of God continues to be the impulse that creates energy in Earth, and we reintroduce ourselves to the amazing truth that the Word, meaning Jesus, is born of flesh and blood on Earth. Earth is where God is born, made of the stuff of Earth, a message reflected in the Affirmation of Faith during the next few weeks.

Where do we start with our creation stories? Well, our Genesis text says we start ‘In the beginning’; We look back to a beginning where we have Jewish people telling their story of God. If you were asked, “Tell us your story of God, from beginning to end, what would you say?” Would you open your bible to Genesis and listen to the stories of the Israelites? Or would you google Wikipedia to study the origins of several different religions. And maybe you would do both. You might also just sit down with a friend or neighbor, and share your own stories on how you think God started this planet.

You see, that’s a little like what we will do this morning. I will share a story from Genesis 1 telling us that God is part of our beginning, and you will leave with your own preconceived ideas and experiences, and you may even take a few ideas from our Scripture texts home with you. Because this is the real truth in exploring the meaning of life or answering the question, “How did we originate?” We borrow the written thoughts from Jewish desert dwellers, priests, sages, and philosophers, who first shared their creation stories around a camp fire, and then later these same stories were written down.

In the beginning, about 3,000 years ago, Jewish desert dwellers, in what is present-day southern Israel, told a story around campfires about the creation of the first man and first woman.  The story they told, and passed on to generations of future desert dwellers, described a pre-creation scene much like the desert landscape in which they daily struggled for existence.  I wonder if they looked up at the stars at night with their glowing brilliance and naturally began to question how life began. The stars, where did they come from? The sand beneath them as they sit around the campfire, where did the sand come from? And the water hugging the shoreline, and passing travelers who shared their creation stories with them, all of these ideas formed our current Genesis story.

And then sometime around 560 B.C., a Jewish writer, most likely a priest during a dark time in the history of Jewish exile, begins to construct a story of God to help his people endure the harshness of living in a land where there was no temple to worship God. This priest might have thought, “We are refugees in a foreign land, but our God travels with us. Let me write down the story of God and creation.” So, his story, and maybe the added stories of other Jews, became our creation story as well.

The story the writer put together from the various texts is a compelling one.  Without question, it has the most significant history—if that term is appropriate for such a blend of real events and legends—ever written.  Some of the events he described are consistent with other historical records, but many others—generally those before the time of Saul and David, or about 1000 B.C.—cannot be tested for accuracy, and are no doubt shaped to reflect the priest’s religious and political goals.  The history includes dramatic accounts of persecution, escape, exile, sacrifice, and global devastation by a great flood.  It tells of a creator god who watches over his people, tests his people, and promises them great things if only they honor his commandments.  As any great story must be, the history has villains and it has heroes.  No figure plays a more central role in the priest’s manuscript than a prophet by the name of Moses, born in Egypt in the 13th century B.C. Remarkably, memory of Moses survived in the writer’s people through seven centuries—and was, more than likely, the inspiration he needed to write down the story of God’s people.

Do these Scripture texts matter to us today? And does Genesis, the Psalm and the Roman’s text bring further credibility to the creation stories created 3000 years ago? Our texts for this Earth Sunday take my breath away. They are full of the “agency” of the Earth. By agency I mean the power to respond, to do, to communicate, to act for the wellbeing of our earth. As you might expect, each Scripture text today is chosen specifically to turn our attention on how to care for the earth. The Earth in these texts collaborates with God in creation in Genesis, the poetry of Psalms embodies God’s justice-seeking love, we learn how the fear and awe of God model a way to live, and the Romans passage reveals a God who sees humankind clearly, knowing both the good and evil they can do.

But I bring our attention to Psalms. The Psalmist declares that “The Earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord” (Psalm 33:5). Can this be true? The psalmist says the earth itself, the land, is full of God’s steadfast love. And the earth—the land—is to fear God. What would it be like if I had the presence of mind before spraying weed killer on the ground to hesitate, and simply ask myself, “Is this the best way to kill weeds?” The power to support caring for our planet does not only need to happen at the policy-making level. We, too, right where we mow our grass and weed our gardens, make choices on how to care for our earth. The Psalmist tells us that God loves our earth. Can we also love the earth that God loves?

My thoughts reflect back to the young seminary man, who was probably no older than 28 or 29. He understood at the heart level that God loved the earth, and that love needed to somehow be modeled by humans as well. On the surface, it seems rather simplistic to love what God created, all the land, plants, animals and people, and from loving we will be blessed with wholeness. Yet, from the beginning to the end of the bible, we are told that wisdom comes from knowing and loving God, yet people, unlike animals, struggle choosing love over ego or greed or whatever name we choose to use to justify our destruction of the earth we live on. Paul says in Romans, from the The Message, “*Open up your eyes and there it is! By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can’t see: eternal power, for instance, and the mystery of his divine being*. *So nobody has a good excuse. What happened was this: People knew God perfectly well, but when they didn’t treat him like God, refusing to worship him, they lost their way and became silly and confused so that there was neither sense nor direction left in their lives…They traded the glory of God for cheap figurines*.”

We have no excuses, Paul, tells us. We are to worship the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our mind, and with all soul. When we choose not to worship God, as Paul says, we become confused and we lose our direction. With gratitude and worship can we do this instead, “*Let all the earth fear the LORD, let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him*.” This is how we love our earth and each other. Amen.