

“A Watershed Moment”

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First Congregational United Church of Christ, Gaylord, Michigan

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Texts: Ezekiel 47: 6-12 and Revelation 21: 1-7

The word “watershed” has two definitions, according to Merriam-Webster: a region or area bounded peripherally by a divide and draining ultimately to a particular watercourse or body of water; and a crucial dividing point, line, or factor. Today, we’re going to talk about both as we finish the first part of our sermon series based on Daniel Cooperider’s book *Speak with the Earth and It Will Teach You*. We’ve talked a lot about all things water, especially the impact of the rivers of our county, state, nation and world. Today, though, we consider the truth that we are truly at a watershed moment related to our watersheds.

Make no mistake that water is the most precious resource on the planet. Even though water seems to be everywhere, much of it is not suitable for our consumption. Therefore, we must care about our water. And we must look for ways to conserve it, protect it, and perhaps the hardest thing to consider is that we must look for ways to share it. Mary Oliver puts it this way:

I would say that there exist a thousand unbreakable links between each of us and everything else, and that our dignity and our chances are one. The farthest star and the mud at our feet are family; and there is no decency or

sense in honoring one thing, or a few things, and then closing the list. The pine tree, the leopard, the Platte River, and ourselves – we are at risk together, or we are on our way to a sustainable world together. We are each other's destiny.

Most people are uncomfortable with the book of Revelation in our Bible. It's misused, misinterpreted, and mistaken about its message and impact for people of faith and for all people. The book is a unique text, as are other apocalyptic literature in our Bible, like the book of Daniel and some of the Apostle Paul's writings. Many people think that these types of literature are about the end of the world – and great movies are made about the apocalypse. That's not quite what these books are about. "Apocalypse comes from a Greek word meaning 'unveiling' or 'uncovering,' like when the curtains are pulled back in the theater to give the first glimpse of the stage setting, or when wrapping paper is torn off revealing the gift. Revelation attempts to lift the veil on the deep future, on the end of time, wrapped as it is in a dense shroud of dark enigma" (Cooperrider, p44).

"With its final unveiling, the end of Revelation offers a bright, beaming, beautiful vision of what we can call apocalyptic hope. Apocalyptic hope is a type of hope that's not necessarily dependent on present circumstances or present outlook, but that takes a deep view of time. Apocalyptic hope is the type of hope

that Czech politician Vaclav Havel was pointing to when he said: 'Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how well it turns out.' Revelation was written at a time of great despair for the Christian community, when the Roman Empire was persecuting Christianity and otherwise seemed on a crash course of consume and conquer and burn up the world. In the face of a reality like that, apocalyptic hope trusts that, while we might not be able to see the how or when of it, the ultimate end of things will make sense and will tend towards the good because the ultimate end of things will tend towards God. The ultimate end of things will be with God. The ultimate end of things will be God (Cooperrider, p45)."

Over the course of this week, I spent time, as perhaps you did, considering the record-breaking heat across our southern United States, as well as across other parts of the world. Meanwhile, monster storms wreak havoc around the nation as well as the world. Climate scientists and activists are clear that the climate is changing, and it doesn't bode well for our future as the human race. But amid all the bad news, and the real fear that young people (in particular) have about the future of the planet, there is another voice that is saying "We are unstoppable, another world is possible." A rally, protest song arises in the midst of student outcry over the planet's future. Here's some of the lyrics: People

gotta rise like water/We gotta face this crisis now/I hear the voice of my great granddaughter/ Saying climate justice now/I hear the voice of my great granddaughter...a battle for dignity of earth and everything on it...the radical trust that “another world is possible.”

In the words of Daniel Cooperrider, “That’s apocalyptic hope. That’s ‘I saw a new heaven and a new earth.’ That’s ‘Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal.”

Like I alluded to last week, we don’t save places we don’t love. That is the direct quote of environmentalist Baba Dioum. “We can’t love places we don’t know. And we don’t know places we haven’t learned.”

I hope you have learned, like I have over the past several weeks, something more about the water that is in Northern Michigan. I hope you’ll pay attention to where your watershed is and be aware of what you put down the drain, or in the yard, or wherever, and how it might impact the watershed in which you live. Cooperrider asks the question about where he lived in Vermont, but for you and for me, what happens to a drop of water that falls on our church roof? What happens to a drop of water that drops on your home roof? Where does it go? What is downstream? Would fish swim in those waters? What other life depends

on those waters? Would we as a church baptize someone in them, full immersion style? What would these rivers look like ten years from now? Or 100? More importantly, what do we want them to look like? Cooperrider asks, “What’s our most beautiful, most daring apocalyptic hope for these rivers of the water of life? What’s our vision of our own new Eden, our new Jerusalem, our own heaven here on earth, our own local watershed of God?” Will our watershed be like the vision of the heavenly river from Ezekiel: Wherever the river flows, everything will live” (Ezekiel 47:9)?

I want to end this morning with the words from a card I received some time ago when someone participated in our church. This is called “Advice from a River”. I offer it to you as sage advice for such a time as this...a watershed moment. The author is Ilan Shamir and more of his work can be found at yourtruenature.com:

Go with the flow

Slow down and meander

Be thoughtful of those downstream

Go around obstacles

Immerse yourself in nature

Stay current

The beauty is in the journey!

My friends, in the end all this world is a part of the sacred watershed of God. It's all part of holiness. This garden earth of ours. And a river runs through it.

Amen and amen.