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Sermon by Kimiko Karpoff

God's Dirty Hands

The earth was dry. A wasteland, really, of dust and hard ground. Gritty in your hands and blowing across the emptiness. This is how it began.

But deep, deep in the ground, there was water. It began to seep upward. And then a little spring bubbled through a crack in the dust. And it became like a fountain until it finally spread over the thirsty earth. And as the water soaked into the earth, the dust became rich and fertile. And God was there, ready to turn that dust and water into... well into all of this.

God was there to nurture this new creation. And I should tell you that I don't generally understand God, nor experience God, in what would be called theistic terms. God for me is not typically a 'Being' in that way. No larger-than-life man in the sky.

However, in this story, God is *so* a gardener, with hands to put in dirt, planting and nurturing the first garden. Maybe a smudge of dirt on the nose or sweat on a brow. This is a God who is not afraid to get dirty. Shaping and hoeing, encouraging and nurturing creation in an active and palpable way.

God takes some of that dry soil mixed with water and forms *adam*, a person out of the mud. Mud that may even contain a drop of sweat off of God's brow. And using God's own breath creates a living being. A sacred being.

In this intimate, sweaty, hands-on act of creation, God created the world; the earth, the creatures of sea, sky and land, plant life, and people, woman and man together. God's creation was intricate. It contained all that every plant and creature would need to survive, but also every plant and creature needed the other plants and creatures to survive. Every living thing needed to respect and value, to love, each element of creation in order to ensure its own survival.

In this way we were given life and invited into relationship. And we were shown what it takes to be in relationship with this creation that we are now part of. It's dirty.

We are always in relationship. With creation, with the life force energy that some of us know as God, with each other. In our modern, wired, concrete and scientific world, the notion that all creation needs all of creation to survive sometimes becomes remote.

And yet there are moments that remind us. In the last few years, global warming has reminded us. We set aside days to remind us, such as Earth Day, April 22, which is this Thursday. Earth Day is a good time to remember that we are responsible for the garden that creation's nurture is in our hands. And while we no longer live in that original garden, we live from the seeds of that original garden.

I find it amazing to think about. All of the plants that we eat, that beautify our spaces, that clean our air, produce fruit, make shade, supply lumber, all of that has come through the ages from the first moments of creation. Seed to plant, fruit to seed, tended by hands covered in dirt. For someone like me who does not garden and is not in the rhythm of saving seeds and planting them in the spring, I rarely think about

that. Literally millions of hands over thousands of years have toiled over and prayed over and nurtured the scattered garden that we now live in.

I suppose that many of us don't even think of ourselves as living in a garden anymore. Particularly in the city where we are surrounded by buildings and concrete and cars, garden is not generally the descriptive that we use. And yet all that is around us comes from that original place. In fact I wonder if the bigger task of Earth Day is to learn to see Eden all around us.

Our part of the garden includes what we have made from it. Spaces like this one where we gather in community to worship, to grow together and nurture each other. As part of our worship time today we will get our hands dirty tending to this place. That might include tending to the more garden-like spaces outside or the inside spaces, cupboards and nooks and crannies. All are important. When we put our hands in the dirt, whether actual or metaphorical, it allows the waters to well up, it helps us to bring to fruition the life that is waiting there for loving hands to help make it live.

This is a place of relationship. Sometimes when we come here, we might feel like we are that parched ground waiting for water. And sometimes we are the water that God has called forth to relieve someone else's parched ground.

I'm just thinking back to the image of God crafting the *adam*, the person out of mud. I can imagine the tenderness that went into shaping the body, each finger just so, smoothing the surface of the face. And as soon as the *adam* was formed God entrusted him with a task. He got to name the animals.

This reminds me of learning how children are viewed, from an indigenous perspective. Children in indigenous cultures are seen as sacred beings who come into the world complete with unique gifts to be nurtured. This contrasts to the Western idea of children as an empty vessel to be filled or as needing to be taught obedience. Martin Brokenleg who recently retired from the Vancouver School of Theology, noted that to say "you're acting like a child" in the Lakota language of his ancestry, would be to say to someone, "you're acting like a sacred being," shifting it's meaning in a delightful way.

I find a shift in myself when I begin to think of others as sacred beings. I feel a shift in myself when I approach creation as a sacred being. When I recognize creation as sacred it moves me deep in my own being in the same way that seeing a new born baby moves me. I am filled with wonder at the amazingness of life. I want to touch and smell and experience that life. And I want my presence, my role in creation to be life giving.

With dirty hands God nurtured that first life in an act of love that renders all of this sacred. We are part of that and an on-going part of its ongoing-ness. This place is part of that. And I note that as a congregation you have demonstrated an act of love and nurture in blessing Nancy with time to reconnect with her own sacredness. Her time away requires you to get your own hands in it even more. You will be called on to actively care for this place and for each other.

Moments such as Earth Day, moments such as today when our many hands work together to nurture this gathering place, these are times that remind us that we all have a hand in creation. When we look at each other and see sacred beings, when we look at the world and see sacredness, may we be moved to get our hands dirty so new life may come out of the mud.

May it be so.