

I speak to you in the name of our Creator, the Risen Christ and the Holy Spirit, the one who heals, restores, and transforms us. Amen.

This year the Anglican Church of Canada has designated this first Sunday in the Season of Creation to be the Feast of the Creator. The theme for today is “The Creator’s Many Faces.”

One of the wonderful things about the Bible is that it does not give us only one picture of God. If you asked different biblical writers, “Who is the Creator?” you would get different answers. The psalmist might say, “The Lord.” The writer of Proverbs might say, “Wisdom.” Genesis speaks of the breath, or Spirit, of God moving over the face of the waters. John says, “In the beginning was the Word.” And Paul tells us that all things have been created through Christ and for Christ. These are not competing descriptions of God. They are different ways of approaching the mystery of the one Creator.

Perhaps one of the problems we have created for ourselves is that we have become accustomed to imagining God in only one way. We picture God as an old man with a white beard somewhere above the clouds. Or perhaps we picture God primarily as a king sitting on a throne, or as a judge keeping score, or as a distant architect who designed the universe, set it in motion, and then stepped back to watch what happened.

But Scripture is much more imaginative than that. The Bible gives us a God who creates through Wisdom, a God who creates through breath, a God who creates through Word, and a God who creates through Christ. The readings today give us several of these images, and together they invite us to look again at the relationship between God and the world.

Let's begin with Proverbs. In Proverbs 8, Wisdom speaks. In Hebrew, *hokmâ*, wisdom, is grammatically feminine. In the Greek tradition she becomes Sophia, also feminine. Wisdom says that she was present before the mountains were formed, before the earth and the springs of water. She describes herself as beside God as God created, and she speaks of delighting in the inhabited world and in the human race. This is a different way of imagining creation from the picture of a distant God designing a universe like an engineer designing a machine. Wisdom is present with God in creation. She rejoices in what is being made. Christian tradition has often connected this figure of Wisdom with the Holy Spirit. We should be careful not to say that Proverbs itself identifies Sophia with the Spirit. It doesn't. But the connection is understandable because the Spirit is also associated with God's life-giving presence in creation.

And that brings us to the *ruach* of God. Psalm 33 says, "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth." The breath of God's mouth! The Hebrew word translated "breath" is *ruach*. It can mean breath, wind, or spirit. We hear the same word in Genesis 1, where the *ruach* of God moves over the face of the waters. Depending on how we translate the Hebrew, we can hear the Spirit of God hovering or even brooding over the waters, or the wind of God sweeping across them. The ambiguity is part of the beauty of the language. Breath, wind, and Spirit belong together. This is a common feature of Hebrew—it is called wordplay. How's that for fancy academic term! The same word can describe the wind moving across the waters, the breath moving in and out of our lungs, and the mysterious Spirit of God moving within creation. And *ruach* is grammatically feminine in Hebrew. Again, this does not mean that God is biologically male or female. But it does remind us that Scripture is perfectly

capable of using feminine language and imagery when speaking about God's presence.

Then John gives us another way of speaking about the Creator: the Word. "In the beginning was the Word." John deliberately takes us back to Genesis. He wants us to hear the opening words of the Bible again: "In the beginning." But John tells the story differently. Before creation, there is the Word. The Word is with God, and the Word is God. And through the Word, all things come into being. A little further down in verse 14, John tells us that "The Word became flesh." The creative Word of God entered creation. The one through whom all things came into being became part of the world that had come into being through him. God did not remain safely outside of creation. God entered it. God took on flesh. God breathed human breath. God walked upon the earth. God experienced hunger and exhaustion. God wept. God touched human bodies. God lived among us. And so Christians look at Jesus and say: this is the face of the Creator.

Paul takes this further in Colossians. Christ is "the image of the invisible God." Think about that phrase. The invisible God has an image, and that image is Christ. But Paul does not stop with Jesus being an image of God. He says, "All things have been created through him and for him." All things. Not just human beings. Not just the Church. Not just people who believe the right things. All things: things in heaven and things on earth, things visible and things invisible. Christ is woven into creation itself. Creation is through Christ, creation is for Christ, and creation is held together in Christ.

The material world matters to God. And that brings us to someone who has helped many people recover this part of the Christian imagination: Wendell Berry

of blessed memory, who many of you will know as a poet, novelist, farmer, and essayist. He lived and farmed in Kentucky for most of his life, and his writing consistently returned to land, farming, community, work, limits, and our responsibility toward the places in which we live. He died this past Monday at the age of 92. Wendell was not an environmentalist in the sense of simply telling us to appreciate beautiful landscapes. His concern was more fundamental. He questioned the ways in which modern society separates us from the land that sustains us and from the communities in which we belong. His work challenged an economic culture that treats land, animals, food, and even human beings primarily as resources. For Wendell, our relationship with the earth is also a spiritual matter. here is one of his best known poems: “The Peace of Wild Things.”

*When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

Wendell was asked what he meant by that beautiful phrase, “the grace of the world.” He explained that he meant it in a religious sense. He said that people of

faith understand that the world is maintained every day by the same force that created it. He connected this with the belief that all creatures live by God's breath and participate in God's Spirit.

This is the movement we have been following through Scripture this morning. Proverbs gives us Wisdom present with God in creation. Genesis gives us the *ruach* moving over the waters. Psalm 33 speaks of creation coming through God's word and breath. John speaks of the Word through whom all things came into being. Colossians says that all things have been created through Christ and are held together in him. Wendell takes that theology and asks what it means for the way we actually live.

- If the earth is God's creation, then it is not merely raw material for us to use.
- If other creatures receive their life from God, then they are not simply resources.
- If the land is part of God's creation, then the way we treat land matters.
- If human beings are creatures among creatures, then we need to recover humility about our place in the world.

Wendell's great contribution was to bring these questions down to earth. Quite literally.

- What kind of soil are we leaving behind?
- Where does our food come from?
- Who works the land?
- What happens to communities when agriculture becomes industrialized?
- What does it mean to belong to a particular place?
- What does it mean to stay long enough to know a place?

These are not simply economic or environmental questions. They are questions about what kind of creatures we are. And this may be one of the reasons Wendell's work has resonated so strongly with people of faith. He reminds us that theology cannot remain entirely abstract. If we believe that God is Creator, then creation has consequences for the way we live. The Bible itself makes this connection. The creation stories do not present human beings as owners of the earth. We are placed within creation. We depend upon the soil, water, plants, animals, air, and seasons around us. We receive life before we can accomplish anything.

And this is where Wendell's understanding of creation can help us hear that it is not simply a doctrine about something God did a very long time ago. Creation describes our continuing relationship with God and with the world around us. We are part of the created order—We belong to the earth—And we belong to one another. Wendell's vision of creation was never simply about going out into nature alone and feeling peaceful. He was deeply concerned about human communities, local economies, neighbours, farmers, families, and the practices that allow people and places to flourish together. Creation is relational. We are living in a time when it is easy to forget our relationships with the places where we live and with the people and creatures who make our lives possible. We can buy food without knowing who grew it. We can drink water without thinking about where it came from. We can live in one place while our economic decisions affect people and ecosystems thousands of kilometres away. We can throw something away without ever seeing where "away" actually is. Wendell invites us to slow down enough to notice these connections. The Creator's many faces are not simply theological ideas. They are invitations to encounter God: the God who is Wisdom, the God

who is Breath, the God who is Spirit, the God who is Word, the God who has become flesh in Christ, the God who is beyond every image and yet continually reveals God's presence within the world God loves.

So this Season of Creation, perhaps we might look again. Look at the earth. Look at the water. Look at the trees. Look at one another. Look at the face of Christ. And listen. Because the Creator is still speaking. The Spirit is still breathing. Wisdom is still delighting in the world. Christ is still holding all things together. And creation is still becoming.

Thanks be to God. Amen.