Compassion Liturgy

A MAN holds his dog as they wait to be scanned for radiation exposure Wednesday at a temporary scanning center for residents living close to the quake-damaged Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant.
Invitation to Compassion

Earthquake Survivors

St. Andrew’s
Fourth Sunday Service

September 25, 2011

Erwin First United Methodist Church

a nancy sullivan murray original

Music coordinator: Colleen Snow
The Canticle of the Sun

by Francis of Assisi

1) Most high, all powerful, all good, our Lord!
   All praise is yours, all glory, all honor, and all blessing.

2) To you, alone, Most High, do they belong.
   No mortal lips are worthy to pronounce your name.

1) Be praised, our Lord, through all your creatures,
   especially through Brother Sun,
   who brings the day, and you give light through him.
   And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor!
   Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

2) Be praised, our Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars;
   in the heavens you have made them bright, precious and beautiful.

1) Be praised, our Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,
   and clouds and storms, and all the weather,
   through which you give your creatures sustenance.

2) Be praised, Our Lord, through Sister Water;
   she is very useful, and humble, and precious, and pure.

1) Be praised, our Lord, through Brother Fire,
   through whom you brighten the night.
   He is beautiful and cheerful, and powerful and strong.

2) Be praised, our Lord, through our sister Mother Earth,
   who feeds us and rules us,
   and produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

1) Be praised, our Lord, through those who forgive for love of you;
   through those who endure sickness and trial.

2) Happy those who endure in peace,
   for by you, Most High, they will be crowned.

1) Be praised, our Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
   from whose embrace no living person can escape.

2) Happy those she finds doing your most holy will.
   The second death can do no harm to them.

1 & 2) Praise and bless our Creator and give thanks;
   serve the Holy One with great humility, amen
Opening Hymn, # 550

All - *Introibo ad altare Deo, ad Deum qui laetificat juventutum meum.*
We are gathered in this sacred space to renew our hearts with youthful joy.

All - Spirit of Creation, teach us the way of Compassion
Christ of Emmaus, guide us into the mystery of being human.
Fire of Pentecost, grant us your gifts of healing and forgiveness.

Let us pray:

Leader - O Holy One of Blessing . . .

1st Reading - from our Creation Story (in French & English)

2nd Reading - *The Canticle of the Sun*

3rd reading - *Stardust*, by Ernesto Cardenal (in Spanish and English)

Gospel and Homily

Presentation of the Bread
Hymn # 340

Blessing, Breaking, Sharing
Piano Interlude–Sister Terri

Silent Meditation

Reading - from Dante’s *Paradiso*, the last Canto (in Italian and English)

All - Time for sharing thoughts and reflections

Final Hymn - Leaning on the Everlasting Arms #328
CHARTER FOR COMPASSION

The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

It is also necessary in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others—even our enemies—is a denial of our common humanity. We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.

We therefore call upon all men and women — to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion — to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate — to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures — to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity — to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings—even those regarded as enemies.

We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.

charterforcompassion.org
Homily - Sept 25th, Erwin Church    nancy sullivan murray

You may well be wondering what all of this so far has to do with compassion - the hymn, the readings, the photo, the different languages. I hope I can make sense of it for you. The photo for example: it leapt off the front page to become an iconic image for me, not just of survival but of the deep interconnection that exists between human beings and the animals. In this case, between a nameless person and a dog. I actually used the photo as my screen saver for a number of weeks, just so I wouldn’t forget that the earthquake had happened and that suffering was converted into compassion right before my eyes, so to speak. Take a moment to observe their eye contact. The hymn we just sang celebrates the tenderness they exchanged: “All Creatures of Our God on High.”

The first reading introduces our sacred stories — or better still, it opens our sacred story, one that is still evolving. Creation is a forever process, unfolding moment by moment, even as we celebrate this Sabbath. The reading tells us that we have been given a special place to grow up in, a garden that we need to care for. From the perspective of the 21st century, it’s interesting that original sin passed down through time while concern for the fate of the ecology took twenty centuries to prick our conscience, and yet it was our responsibility from the beginning.

The canticle composed by Francis of Assisi gives voice to the wonder and awe we experience when and if we take the time to observe all that surrounds us, or when we recall a scene that quite literally took our breath away. I won’t list my examples; close your eyes and let one such memory rise up, one that you may have later described to others as breathtaking. What you may not realize is that those moments of wonder and awe continue to redound to our acts of loving kindness. In other words, it’s because our experiences can lift us out of our ego-self, that we become mindful of the pain and sufferings of others: wonderment lies at the root of compassion.
We then proceeded from the beginning of time to the 13th century to the present day. Ernesto Cardenal's poem sings of a new revelation in cosmology: another occasion for wonder and awe. We have learned quite recently, as measured in scientific explorations, that each of us, all human beings in fact carry within our bodies what the physicist Brian Swimme calls "pieces of the stars." Cardenal makes use of an uncanny metaphor to proclaim that we are stardust; we actually share the very same minerals that are contained in those celestial bodies. As we begin to find ourselves at home in the new cosmology, we may notice that there’s a disconnect between the traditional exegesis of the creation story, even when room is given for the Big Bang theory, and the modern scientific discoveries of how the whole thing works. I relish the image of myself as Stardust and the thought that to the stars I shall return.

We are living in an amazing new era that some are calling the ecological age, one that needs a new language to communicate its meaning to an ordinary person like myself, and one that needs a new theology to articulate the religious implications. Thomas Berry, who while he lived was affectionately known as the theologian of the cosmos, has written about this phenomenon, often in dialogue with physicists, astrophysicists and theologians. Here is one of his early observations: The Universe, the solar system and the planet earth are the primary revelation of that ultimate mystery whence all things emerge into being.

Which brings us to the Gospel of Mark. Why did I choose this section instead of the many verses relating to the compassion shown by Jesus? The so-called Golden Rule is almost a cliché; it slips off our tongue with ease; we use it to prove a point or to set an example. Do unto others, blah, blah blah. But it is not a cliché for Karen Armstrong and the thousands of others all over the world who have signed The Charter For Compassion. Karen is a respected scholar in several fields of study, although her central focus for the last decade has been on mythology, the history of religions, and on the founding or charismatic figures associated with them: Confucius, Muhammad, the Buddha, the Dalai Lama and many others.
For her original and scholarly texts, Karen was awarded a prize of $100,000 from the TED group in 2007, which she is using to (Quote) "build a global community in which all peoples can live together in mutual respect." What she had discovered in her years of research was that there is one common thread that runs through and is shared by every faith tradition, one that can initiate and/or strengthen the interrelationships that are necessary to create a peaceful global community. That thread, believe it or not, is the Golden Rule: "Always treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself."

The Charter highlights the essential unity and equality of the entire human family and it implies the duty we have to cultivate a concern for all our neighbors in the global community. That's why I asked our readers to proclaim in different languages, hoping that would add just the merest hint of our connection to the wider world. I didn't ask any of my Muslim friends to read in Arabic, but here's just this one quote from the Qur'an, Sura 49:13, on global relationships. (quote)"Allah speaks to all of humanity: 'Behold, we have created you all out of a male and a female and have formed you into tribes and nations so that you may get to know one another.'"

Compassion is a life-long process. It isn't an attitude; it's the Golden Rule brought to life. It demands a great deal of self-discipline; we have to be awake; we have to develop the art of listening to the Other. We have to remember to forgive; remember to be tender hearted; remember to be kind to ourselves -- that's where compassion starts. Remember to remember.

Don't delete our sacred stories from your inner landscape: just paste in the new ones. Let me end by paraphrasing Elizabeth Johnson's words. By listening to others speak of where the Creator Spirit is moving in our lives, and by calling for the praxis of universal solidarity in suffering and in hope, we can begin to imagine the world anew and commit our energies to healing, compassion, and liberating action. May it be so ---- Let us say Amen.