

At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian Army...The Lord is a Warrior...So then, each of us will be accountable to God...Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times...

Imagine the Israelites, led on the path by God-who guided the way by day in a pillar of cloud and at night in a pillar of fire, finding their way to freedom from the Egyptians. Moses, filled with the power of the Lord, stretches out his hand over the sea and divides it, creating an "escape route" on dry land. I believe that one cannot be certain just exactly how all of this did occur, but suffice to say, that by following God, trusting in his presence and his desire to rescue and reconcile and restore, the people are brought safely to The Promised Land(though Moses doesn't enter it-but that's another chapter).

Do you remember lying on your back, gazing into the blue summer sky, imagining the cumulous clouds to be any number of objects or perhaps a parade of creatures? Your imagination lent itself, with creative license, to see myriad possibilities in the white fluffy masses floating by. Though arthritic knees and aching backs may prohibit some of us from sacking out on a blanket (fearing the display we'd create, should anyone see us trying to get back to a standing position) maybe we still tip our head to the heavens and visualize something special in the massive whipped cream looking mounds. Other times when the cumulonimbus clouds, stretch across the sky as thunderheads, forecasting rain, we can see it coming, and we're amazed.

For some, a campfire, flames joining one another in a tango, captivates the eye. The teepee of logs engulfed in orang/blue tongues of heat bringing warmth, light, a sensation of peace to day's end is inviting and welcome. And maybe the firelight is a beacon to help direct one safely back to the circle if you happen to wander away for a time.

September 1st through Feast of St. Francis, on October 4th, is Care of Creation month. This may be the ideal time to think about clouds and fire. Not the billowy clouds that pique the imagination or the controlled, when it gets dark, marshmallow roasting variety of fire. Instead, our focus might be drawn to the west, where much of the sky is pitch black even in the day time. A faint red tinge is visible. There is barely a breath of air anywhere, particularly in the small closed up apartments where AC isn't an option and kids stay indoors, because it's too dangerous to be outside. Hundreds of people are fleeing their communities, leaving behind only memories and burned ruins. Trees, vegetation, animals, burnt flesh and charred stumps. And the sad truth is that it isn't only here, in our "neck of the woods" that this is happening/has happened. The Amazon, life breath for much of the world, is smoldering and being deforested at the hands of greedy land grabbers and wild cat ranchers whose only interest is in making money for themselves.

There may be debate about climate change and global warming. But to scientists, the fingerprints of global warming on the wildfires and other disasters, are clear. People knowledgeable in the field tell us that how bad it gets, depends on how humans do to reduce heat trapping gas emissions. In the United States, more than half of the electricity comes from polluting coal-fired plants and power plants are the single largest source of heat trapping. A

side-bar- One of the “blessings” that has come from the COVID pandemic shelter in place, lockdown, is the result in the largest drop in greenhouse gas emissions in recorded human history. Intense, extensive heat waves and droughts exacerbated by climate change, create perfect circumstances for the spread of wild fires. Along with the fires come the clouds of pollutants and suffocating air quality.

So, what has this to do with today’s readings? As the clouds help us to see the coming storm, we ought not be surprised that all of nature, changes in it or lack of, may in some way be a harbinger of things to come.

It seems perhaps that we, too, are wandering, looking for the path that will take us to a place of safety and freedom. An “escape route” of sorts that leads to a promised land, a peaceable kingdom, a return to Eden. But, the route taken by our ancestors, thousands of years ago and as must be true for each generation, the route described in Exodus says, they walked on dry ground THROUGH the sea, not past or around or over.

It was not without struggle and strife that the Israelites journeyed and neither can you and I expect that our earthly travels will be trouble free. We do, however, have the ability to choose, to a degree, how it is we’ll live our lives on this planet; how we’ll co-exist with other human beings, who are also God’s children; the ways in which we consume, use, and treat the natural resources gifted to us as stewards of God’s creation-ALL of it. There is the choice to either deny what science tells us or to embrace the knowledge, as painful as it is, and explore ways in which we might contribute to the healing, restoration, and well-being of Mother Earth and her inhabitants. We can, with God’s help-be “warriors”, advocates for those without voice-for trees and plants and animals-this is a part of what’s called Eco-justice.

Paul advises us in the reading from Romans that each of us will be accountable to God. I don’t know about you, but I don’t picture God with a clipboard and Bic, making check marks next to my name. I can’t say for sure what happens next, but I do believe that in the kingdom here and now, with each day that I’m given, I have a responsibility to “do justly, and love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.” As Jesus Followers, we’ve been given examples of how it is we are to conduct our lives. Practicing compassion, mercy, and love, and employing fruits of the spirit as a guide, our accountability need not be a shameful one. By placing our trust in the ever-present Love, keeping the faith as we endeavor to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, calling upon and acting with the Will of the Holy Spirit, our words and actions can be pillars of cloud and fire that bring light and hope to others as we walk through our days.

In response to Peter’s question about forgiving someone, Jesus responds with a tall order! In essence, I think that Jesus says forgiveness isn’t a one-shot deal. For most of us, it’s a process that we live into. It is a way in which we align our lives with God. It’s the only way forward. Might we take a look at “the flip side”? How often must we seek for forgiveness?

At the 2018 General Convention, 19 resolutions for Care of Creation were passed. I encourage you to read them. One place to find them is at episcopalclimatenews.com. Resolution A018

connects climate change to Christian Mission and ethics: “Resolved, that climate change be recognized as a human-made threat to all God’s people, creatures, and the entire created order, while particularly placing unjust and inequitable burdens and stresses on Native peoples, those displaced by environmental change, poor communities, and people of color.”

Perhaps as we examine our lifestyles and choices, we will see areas where we could improve. As we come to better understand our interdependence and relationships, we will realize our obligation and responsibility? Maybe we will be humble enough to ask for forgiveness for our careless, selfish behaviors and appetites that threaten to destroy our beautiful world?

God saw everything that He had made, and indeed, it was very good.

Amen