**SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**September 17, 2017 ~ *Celebration of Creation Sunday***

**Psalm 24:1-2: *The Earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.* John 8:31-32: *If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the***

***truth, and the truth will make you free.***

**A DECLARATION OF INTERDEPENDENCE**

***(of frolicking foxes and fireflies; of flowers and fossils and finiteness; of facts and figures and flights of fantasy; of frogs and fractals; of fruits and friends and family; of faith and force fields; of fright, flight, and fight; of fragility, freedom and forgiveness)***

Good morning! In recent years Second Church has lifted up the importance of the Care of Creation from the perspectives of the Christian Faith, science, and Native American Life Ways. During today’s Sunday Forum, several Second Church members in the science field shared how their faith influences their scientific understanding. My reflection this morning will share how science has affected my faith journey and ministry and how science, Christian Faith, and Indigenous LifeWays weave together an understanding of how G-O-D calls us to live justly in this realm of Creation.

Here in St Louis, we live in a city of pioneering bio-tech industry and medical research. Here, we live in the land of Lewis and Clark, Dred Scott, and the Gateway to Westward Expansion (or Manifest Destiny and Domination, depending on who’s telling the story). Here, we also live in the land of the Missouri and Mississippi River Watersheds and Bioregion once inhabited by the Osage, Ioway, Oto, Missouria, the Shawnee, Delaware, Algonquin, Kaskaskia, the Cherokee, Cahokia, Illineweh and Oneata—Original Nations of this part of Turtle Island who have much to share about living with reverence as part of this Web of Life.

So, here, in this metropolis and eco system, on the outer edge of the Milky Way Galaxy, one among billions of galaxies, we are rotating at about ~1040 mph, orbiting our sun star at ~67,000 mph, circl- ing the galaxy at ~483,000 mph, and expanding the universe at ~1.3 million mph. And, in the midst of this constant whirling and accelerating—surrounded by hurricanes, floods, fires, wars, refugees, immigrants, missile tests and racial unrest—we wonder, “what’s it all about”, as we sit on this Third Rock from the Sun or Spaceship Earth or Mother Earth or Earth our Common Home. In this space/time matrix, we also find ourselves now in the greatest transition this planet has experienced since the extinction of dinosaurs 65 million years ago. Some are calling it the **Anthropocene** Age due to the impact of humans on Earth’s systems. Others are calling it the **Ecozoic** Age, hoping humanity will allow Earth to be the Home of Life it can be. What we name it doesn’t change the reality of its existence, but what we name it does change our relationship with it and the hope for the quality of our lives and the life of the planet.

Over the centuries, both **science** and the **Christian Faith** have tried to articulate and name “what it’s all about”, often attacking and demonizing each other, or have been used together and separately to legitimize dominating empires’ political oppression and economic exploitation. However, at their best, **science** and the **Christian Faith** can work separately and together to create a world where all the gifts of all the people work cooperatively and peacefully with all creation. In this age of fake news and fiction over facts, **science** and the **Christian Faith** and **Indigenous Life Ways** seek the truth about life from different perspectives.

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**Science** seeks truththrough study, research, experimentation, peer review, building and revising theories as new facts and evidence are revealed. It explores the reality of the matter, mechanisms,

and natural laws of the earth and universe, from the macro to the micro level—the embodied, interconnected vibrations, energy, waves, particles, elements, and force fields as they evolve in the ever changing great Tree of Life. This includes all forms of life, growing creatively and integrally in **individuality, diversity,** and **cooperation—**in increasing **complexity**. **Science** also invents new technologies to enhance, improve, and protect the quality of life.

**Christian Faith** seeks truth as part of an historical/universal body of faith through scriptures and spiritual practices in covenant with G-O-D and neighbor through Jesus. It helps us **first,** to take a relationship to this reality—not as outsiders, but as life emerging from and as part of earth and all creation—the Universe reflecting consciously upon and caring for itself. S**econd,** **Christian Faith** helps us live compassionately and justly as human beings and in sync with all earth’s systems and created beings.  **Christian Faith** raises ethical and moral questions related to scientific exploration and technology: just because we can do something, does that mean we should? How does bowing to the god of perpetual progress and unlimited development affect Earth and all in it?

**Indigenous Life Ways** seeks truth by living in harmony with Earth and the entire Universe as it honors the Way of the Great Spirt.

**Science**, **Christian** **Faith, and Indigenous Life Ways** experience Earth as an awe-filled place. **Christian Faith** and **Indigenous Life Ways** might also call Earth sacred, and see it, as Thomas Berry says, *not as a collection of objects but as a communion of subjects, mutually enhancing the human/earth relationship.*

**Creation, Christian Faith,** **science,** and **Indigenous Life Ways** have been the warp and woof of my personal life and ministry. I grew up, was baptized, confirmed and very active in the Presbyterian Church. However, as a child, I remember thinking that, if G-O-D is real, G-O-D has to be present to every being, everywhere, at all times—not just sequestered by a chosen few, in some places and sometimes.

On parallel tracks, while growing up, my inquiry into the **natural world** of science included collecting rocks, fossils, and shells; playing with a menagerie of pets, and exploring the great outdoors. I also appreciated **science** through everyday life, medicine, classes, and the arts as I was introduced to the intricacies and magnitude of this planet. Also, over the years I encountered **Indigenous Life Ways** through trips to Indigenous sites, reservations, villages, cultural centers and museums; studying; and missional relationships.

As I finished high school, NASA was shooting for the moon, and that exploration became of greater interest to me as the Presbyterian college I attended was the alma mater of astronaut John Glenn. During the last year of college, a religion course assignment was to write a paper describing Jesus. I tried to do this in a way that would relate the energy of the natural world with the energy of agape love personified in Jesus. So I started out: *In the beginning was the Potential, and the Potential was with God, and the Potential was God. The Potential was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through the Potential, and without the Potential not one thing came into being. What has come into being in the Potential was life, and the life was the light of all.* Jesus was an

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embodiment of G-O-D’s Love as Realized Potential, and that same potential birthing us meant human and all creature potential can be realized, not by itself or for its own sake, but by living into its connection with and serving all life.

Later, while studying at seminary during the turbulent Civil Rights and Vietnam era, I discovered the writings of French priest and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. It was an “aha! moment,” connecting the energy and substance of the natural world and the energy of love infusing, enveloping all life, even the larger Cosmos. It rekindled in me a passion and lifelong journey to try to understand the interrelationship of the natural world, **science** and the **Christian Faith**, working together to create a more peaceful world. Teilhard’s words are as relevant today as when I first read: *The age of nations is past. The task before us now, if we would not perish, is to shake off our ancient prejudices and to build the earth.*

In 1969 space exploration continued to accelerate, and the voyage of Apollo 8 captured the photo of the **Earth Rise**, a momentous paradigm shift in our consciousness as human beings. Shortly afterwards, space shots mesmerized us with stunning images of the whole fragile blue marble, floating alone in deep dark space. This was seeing Planet Earth anew: no national boundaries—clouds and storms, sunlight and darkness moving freely over land and sea without passports, a very thin atmospheric layer blanketing, protecting and giving life to this vulnerable home of ours. Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring* shed more light on the wonder of this planet but also sounded the alarm to the negative impact of the human species on earth’s delicately balanced system. This emerging consciousness birthed the first Earth Day Celebration in 1970.

In 1980, Carl Sagan’s award-winning PBS COSMOS series riveted audiences and further explored humanity’s place in the larger, emerging universe. Subsequent space exploration, telescopic lenses, and cosmic calculations indicate that the speck and wonder of our individual lives are part of an immense, magnificent, and continually growing Tree of Life. The roots go deep in time and space to the first burst of energy 13.8 billion years ago, scattering waves and particles, forming stars and galaxies—its branches expanding to 4.5 billion years ago to planet Earth—and first cells morphing and mutating through multi forms as crinoids and trilobites, walking fish and ferns, giant trees and dinosaurs to our present world of butterflies and giraffes, dolphins and fireflies, frogs and foxes, and billions of human beings and cities dotting the world—all creatures of star dust—all related in time and space, developing through ages of creation and extinction. Quite a wondrous Tree of Life!

So, what does **Science** have to do with the **Christian Faith**, the church and ministry? I say everything—both contextually and practically. First, CONTEXTUALLY. **Science** discloses the larger and particular narrative, the awe-filled unfolding drama of life in which we participate individually and communally at many levels as part of this interrelated Tree of Life. The **Christian Faith**, using different language, also talks about this same Tree of Life as it grows in **individuality** as every life is made uniquely in the image of G-O-D; and in **diversity** as it recognizes the variety of gifts of people. And these diverse gifts work together in love—in **communion** with G-O-D and neighbor—including our human, animal, vegetable and mineral neighbors. In the midst of ever increasing economic, political, and cultural **complexity**, our world is indeed a web of life, a KINdom of all Being. The Apostle Paul called it the Body of Christ, with its multiplicity of **interdependent** parts. What we do to this web or to the Tree of Life, we do to ourselves, either at our own peril or prosperity, depending on how we choose.

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**Science** reminds us of our common origin and destiny and that there are natural laws that cannot be broken**. Christian Faith** reminds us that G-O-D is present to us and all creation in the midst of the natural laws of Life. We cannot break the laws of nature or G-O-D; we can only break ourselves

when we try to ignore them. The **Indigenous Life Ways** remind us that we have forgotten much of this ancient wisdom.

In the midst of the natural world and these natural laws and its covenant with G-O-D and neighbor, **Christian Faith** through Jesus proclaims a **WORD of LIFE** that affirms:

-that **Life Is Good**—very good; -that **We Are Loved** just as we are;

-that the **Past is Forgiven**; and -that the **Future Is Open** and frees us to live:

-in **Hope** beyond hoping; -in **Peace** passing understanding;

-in **Joy** and **Thanksgivin**g unceasing; -in **Love** unconditioning.

This is the **Word** that a world of fear and hatred desperately needs to hear—that boldly propels self-conscious life to fulfill its Great Work of building the Beloved Community, balancing **uniqueness, diversity and communion**. It is also the **Word** that gives **Christian Faith** the wisdom to partner with **science** and other faiths, to bring healing to a broken world that so often denies Earth’s con- nectedness. As Einstein mused, *Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind.*

Over many years, this larger context has been foundational to our work as Carleton and I with various ministries, have tried to be communities that are inclusive—welcoming the gifts of all—continually nurturing, learning, and equipping to live in a 21st century universal, earth-honoring milieu, understanding that creation is neither a platform nor background scenery for our separate lives but is the enfolding drama of our life together.

The PRACTICS of ministry flow from this context and inform or raise questions about every aspect of congregational life. How do we **worship** and **serve**, living in the Christ Word, being part of the continuum of consciousness with that which we call G-O-D, with the Church Universal, and with the great Tree of Life in a way that effectively connects body, mind, heart and soul?

PRACTICALLY, this context has called us: to be, as Teilhard says, Earth Builders in a New Paradigm; to be open to new understandings and experiences of G-O-D; to **understand the Bible** through the lens of a dynamic, emergent Universe; to examine **theological presuppositions**; to explore new modes of liturgy, music, and **worship** styles; and to use technology and the arts to more effectively communicate the story. This context has also prompted the PCUSA to facilitate the “greening” of congregations through its **Earth Care Congregations** Program in which we now participate; to create the **Presbyterian Association on Science, Technology and the Christian Faith**—sharing how science and the church can work together; and to initiate the **Joining Hands Partnerships** that advocate for the care of G-O-D’s Earth.

Every aspect of the church’s life has been impacted by science as it relates to creation: **studying** evolution, ecology, climate change and extreme weather, human origins and race, health, gender, and end-of-life issues; **creating** a sustainable building with an energy efficient, non-toxic environ- ment; and globally/locally **addressing** root causes of poverty and injustice related to resource ex- traction contamination; food, land and water security; environmental racism; and living green.

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We support Standing Rock regarding land and water issues related to fossil fuel and are denouncing the 15th century Doctrine of Discovery based on **false theology** and **false science** that said that American Indians and African Americans were not fully human and therefore could be subjugated to slavery, assimilation, relocation and annihilation. This doctrine remains part of US organic law.

Also, we joined our voices with thousands as we participated in the DC March for Science and the People’s Climate March.

**Science**, **Christian Faith,** and **Indigenous Life Ways** are at the intersection of all this as they reveal the truth that all life is connected—the truth that frees us to live with integrity. Facts and evidence woven into an ancient/new awe-inspiring story is what will ignite and guide the imagination of people working together toward a new vision for Earth’s future.

Today, in an era of increasing polarization and conflict, as this earth’s life systems, species, and humanity’s sociological systems are threatened as never before, we **celebrate** **Creation** and Second Church, whose ministry as Earth Builders is a **Declaration of Interdependence,** to help us boldly create the new theological and ethical foundation to support sustainable systems to the seventh generation. Over two centuries ago the colonies were at a crossroads at the time of their Declaration of Independence. They made some very risky, treasonous decisions, some good, some not so good, our independence, expansion, and prosperity often based on stolen land from the First Nations of this land, stolen labor from African Americans, and plundering of Earth’s resources, decisions for which present generations are still paying a great debt. Today, we, too, are at a crossroads, but this time on a much larger scale as a civilization and as a planet. The vitality and viability of this Earth, our Common Home and the survival of the human species are in the balance. There is little margin for error, and there needs to be a movement of many connected people willing to risk getting out of their self-imposed religious, scientific, political, economic, and cultural silos to Build the Earth.

In this 500th Anniversary year of the Protestant Reformation, we live in a time of incredible evolution, revolution, and transformation—a new Reformation for the church and the world. That’s why it’s time to proclaim and act upon a **Declaration of Interdependence**, rights for all creation, not independence, rights for some humans, only. If we don’t do it, we risk treason against the earth and all Creation and betrayal of our calling and Great Work as Christians and humanity. So, these are the times, we are the people! And we are not alone. Today, it’s time to celebrate this **interdependence** of earth by our continued work together. The forward to Teilhard’s book *Building the Earth* states that Teilhard “discerned the rising tide of destructive forces which threaten our planet, and led a call to all humanity to unite in building the earth and making a home for all people”, saying: *Remain true to yourselves, but move ever upward toward greater consciousness and greater love! At the summit you will find yourselves united with all those who, from every direction, have made the same ascent. For everything that rises must converge.* So be it! AMEN!

Elinor (Ellie) Jane H. Stock

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