

## **“A Love Letter to Earth”**

*A homily by the Rev. Dr. Stephanie May*

*First Parish in Wayland*

*March 20, 2016*

As a young child, my bedroom window looked out over the front lawn and across the street to a large horse pasture. A line of tall trees surrounded the field and two more trees anchored the corners of our own front yard. Long before I could say, let alone spell, the word “environment,” I would love looking out my window. As I simply watched and noticed, I would sometimes start singing nonsensical songs about the green, green grass and the green, green trees. Throughout my life, I have tried to hold on to this childlike wonder and awe of the world in which we dwell—to simply notice the colors of the landscape, the architecture of the trees, the light upon the slope of the hill, or the dew upon a spider web.

Beauty surrounds us in so many ways. Do we notice? St. Francis did. In fact, St. Francis of Assisi, a long ago Italian monk, loved the earth and the creatures of the earth so passionately that his love transcended centuries to inspire the music we’ll hear today. Some of the lyrics you may recognize—such as the hymns “For the Beauty of the Earth” and “Touch the Earth”. [You’ll even be invited to join in the singing . . . just follow along in the insert and watch Polly for your cue.] You may also recognize the words of the opening song, “Canticle of Brother Sun”. . . a poem attributed to Francis.

His canticle erupts with praise for the sun and moon, the earth, mountains, and sea as well as the creatures within the world. WOW! He sings. WOW! Look at that and that and that. Just . . . *wow!*

“Praise” may feel a bit “churchy” or old-fashioned to some of our ears. Yet, we do in fact engage in acts of praise in our everyday lives . . . we praise our dog for sitting when we ask or we praise our kids for a job well done on a special assignment or a quarterback launching a well-placed pass. Great job! Wonderful! Fantastic! Praise is a gushing forth of admiration, an exclamation of delight, a soul-deep affirmation of goodness.

And isn’t there much to praise in the world in which we live? The vast blueness of the sky on a clear, sunny day. The birds that cross through that sky knowing their way across continents. The playful puppy chasing a ball across the emerging green lawn. Or, the old cat curled up in the warmth of a sun beam. We hike to the top of a mountain just to see the vista. We drive or fly hours to walk a beach beside an expansive ocean. We kneel in our

gardens to plant flowers or to tend vegetables as they grow. We stop. We notice. We too say . . . *wow!*

We are living in a moment when negative news can be deafening. And there *are* a lot of problems all around us—persistent racism and poverty, Islamophobia, Climate Change, mass migrations of refugees, and a political process teetering on chaos. Amidst this cacophony of troubles grabbing for our attention, it can be easy to forget to notice the beauty, to get distracted from the wonder of the world in which we live.

And there is such beauty. Today's music will call us to attend to the beauty of the earth. I understand *Missa Gaia* to be a kind of love letter to the earth. The text and the music call us to notice the beauty of the earth . . . including the amazing ability of the human voice or hands and fingers to make music! For this hour, let us immerse ourselves in a spirit of praise. Let us exercise our capacities to notice beauty and to find delight in it.

The problems, the ugliness of injustice and avarice, will still be there when the bell chimes the next hour. And yet, having spent this hour attending to beauty, we can hold fast to the knowledge that life is not all hatred, discord, or destruction. Life upon this earth is also beauty, creativity, and love.

So may it be.