

May 10, 2026
Sixth Sunday of Easter
Rogation Sunday
Trinity, St. Louis
The Rev. Dr. Paul Jacobson, *Rector*

Acts 17:22-31
Psalm 66:7-18
1 Peter 3:13-22
John 14:15-21

*Alleluia! Christ is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

This morning, I want us to take a slightly different path, one might say a garden path. Most Sundays, we think together about how God is revealed in holy scripture, most especially in the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ. But our tradition tells us that God has also spoken to us through the Law and the Prophets. In addition, God was revealed through a series of covenants, or promises, made – most notably – with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Jeremiah.

But prior to, and underlying, all of those, God's first revelation, God's first gift to us was Creation. The first line of today's Collect reminds us that God has prepared for us such good things as surpass our understanding. Prepared for us.

Today, the Sixth Sunday of Easter, is also known as Rogation Sunday. The name comes from the Latin *rogare* – to ask. Traditionally, rogation days were the three days before Ascension, which will be on Thursday, where prayers were sung in procession. They seem to have originated in France in the fifth century when a certain Bishop Mamertus introduced days of prayer and fasting to ward off, according to the story one tells, earthquakes or packs of wolves.

In England, rogation days were associated with the blessing of the fields at planting time. The vicar would "beat the bounds" of the parish, processing around the fields reciting psalms and the Litany.

In the United States they have been associated with rural life, agriculture and fishing. Growing beyond its heritage of fasting and prayer, Rogationtide in the springtime has become the root system for what we celebrate in September as the Season of Creation and in November as Thanksgiving for God's gifts of the earth.

So, why do I want us to think about Rogationtide today? The growing season is not the sort of thing we urbanites tend to think much about. There are exceptions, of course, like the community gardens at Central Reform Congregation, St. Louis

University, and St. Timothy's that provide our food ministry community with fresh produce so that they, too, might keep on feasting.

We devote the month of September to exploring the physical and theological necessity of caring for the earth, and we pull out all the stops at Thanksgiving. But Rogation Sunday, at this particular point in the agricultural calendar, offers us the change to develop (or renew) a more intentional, mindful, relationship with God's first gift – Creation.

At first glance, this may sound frivolous. Here we are, facing political pandemonium and unwanted war, and here I am, talking about plants?! But in the hardest of times, we do well to dig down to remember God's first gift.

Sometimes, we, particularly in the Church, tend to view the past as the "good old days." Our rose-colored glasses allow us to think that people in olden times were closer to God, and that you and I live in the absolute worst time possible. I don't think that this is true.

By way of comparison, I want to lift up one of my favorite spiritual writers, a 17th century priest and poet named Thomas Traherne. His writings explore the glory of Creation and creation's role in his intimate relationship with God. But his ornate, flowery, writings – largely unknown until about 100 years ago – did not spring up from some perfect past.

In his short life of 37 years (1637-1674), Traherne's native England suffered through a series of three Civil Wars, the trial and execution of a King, decades of religious and political uncertainty, the restoration of the monarchy, the Great Plague of London (which killed a quarter of London's population in 18 months) and, a just a year later, the Great Fire of London which, in addition to 87 London parish churches and St. Paul's Cathedral, destroyed the homes of 7 out of 8 Londoners. These were hardly the good old days.

Yet, in the midst of this profound chaos and death, Traherne sought God's presence as it was revealed in Creation. Like a 17th century Sir David Attenborough or Marlin Perkins, Traherne sought close contact with nature itself, recommending heading to the fields to consider the heavens, the work of God's fingers (Ps. 8:3) as a meditative practice.¹ For Traherne, the created order "is a glorious mirror wherein you may see the verity (truth) of all religion" (*Cent. II:17*).

Reading Traherne is like trying to walk through a jungle; you need a machete. But, in my most favorite passage, Traherne gives us some advice:

¹ This is Traherne's "literal setting."

*You never enjoy the world aright, till the Sea itself flows in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars: and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world, and more than so, because other people are in it who are every one sole heirs as well as you. Till you can sing and rejoice and delight in God, as misers do in gold, and Kings in sceptres, you never enjoy the world.*²

For Traherne, enjoying the world was essential to knowing God. That seems clear, but there's more, and what I want you to notice is this. Traherne says that I must understand that God's entire creation was made for me, the sole heir. But, and this is key, Creation is not for my needs and desires alone, to exploit however I want. I am not the only sole heir. Every other child of God is also a sole heir.

God's first gift of Creation is never a zero-sum game where anything that you have means that you took it from me. There's not an heir and a beggar. There's no us and them. To appreciate Traherne's wisdom that God's creation is *only* for *all* of us is to begin to love God, and our neighbors as ourselves.

There are also times when we are confronted with our helplessness in the face of natural phenomena – like floods; like tornados. The people of this community continue to deal with the aftermath of the tornado of last May 16. That tornado ripped the Band-Aid off the deep wounds that have been caused by decades of systemic racialized economic and ecological injustice. Some have had the resources to repair or replace and move on. Too many others have not, and struggle still.

And there are those whose lives were lost on May 16:

Juan Baltazar, 48
Deloris Holmes, 70
Rena Lyles, 60
Larry Patrick, 78
Pat Penelton, 75

Spring, with all its rain, seems to be here for real. As green and growing things sprout from the earth, Rogationtide gives us the sense that all creation participates in Christ's resurrection. Traherne reminds us that the gospel calls us to seek justice for **ALL** the sole heirs of God's good world. This is why it is so important to examine our relationship with Creation, and with each other, especially in these difficult and uncertain times.

So, in these lovely, warm and green days, I invite you to spend mindful time outdoors. If you have a yard or garden, bring fresh eyes to their care. Make a prayer of every lawn mowed, of every tree pruned. Plant something new this year. Try a different

² Thomas Traherne, *Centuries of Meditation*, I:29.

variety of flower or vegetable and rejoice in watching what the earth brings forth. If you want or need to stay indoors, try a window box.

When you're out and about in the open air, find a favorite spot, new or old. And, over the course of your walks, pay attention to the patterns of growth. How do the greens change color over time? What variations happen in the shady undergrowth? What insists on pushing up new growth, even from post-tornado stumps? Take time to look at the new trees the City has planted on Washington and Euclid. What are the creatures, especially the birds, up to? What do you see that you've never seen before? Whom do you see that you've never seen before? Who are the sole heirs that live in your neighborhood, pass you on the sidewalk, or stand in line with you at Schnucks? In every case, pay attention, and give God thanks!

As you care for your own corner of Creation, leaving as small a footprint as possible, remember also the gospel's call to care for our sole-heir neighbors who are struggling to feed themselves. Look over the list of needs from Trinity Food Ministry, then do what you can. To paraphrase Traherne, Creation is never about "God and me." It is always about "God and me and thee."

It is providential that on this Rogation Sunday, will also have the opportunity to celebrate the art of Allison Horn, whose beautiful collection of cyanotypes *Reflecting Nature* will be on display in the Parish Gallery through the end of June. Viewing her naturalistic impressionistic pieces is like taking a mindful walk outside. Spending time with them will give you a new and different appreciation of the wonders of God's creation, and your place within it. May God bless your discoveries!

I can think of no better way to conclude than with the prayer that the Church offers to celebrate Thomas Traherne, the poet of Creation. Let us pray...

*Creator of wonder and majesty, you inspired your poet Thomas Traherne with mystical insight to see your glory in the natural world and in the faces of men and women around us: Help us to know you in your creation and in our neighbors, and to understand our obligations to both, that we may ever grow into the people you have created us to be; through our Savior Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in everlasting light. Amen.*³

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

³ September 27. *Holy Women, Holy Men: Celebrating the Saints*. New York: Church Publishing. 2010. p. 621.