

When I was in 5th grade, I wanted to be a meteorologist. For my science project, I constructed a little observation station with a weather vane and a thermometer and a rain gauge and an anemometer that I fashioned somehow out of Dixie cups. I graphed the various readings on poster board. I clipped weather maps and pasted them in a journal.

I certainly didn't win any prizes with my poster board displays and Dixie cup instruments and I don't remember what I got for a grade, but I discovered something. I discovered that weather moves in a pattern of high and low-pressure fronts around the globe. Until that project, I assumed that weather just randomly happened, but it turned out that everything is connected – wind and seasons and currents and the jet stream, even the rotation of the earth on its axis. Everything is connected.

So, if I ruled the world, which sadly I don't, I would require everyone to do a fifth-grade science project on weather, especially if you planned later in life to go into politics or economics or technology, because we all know that the planet is reaching a tipping point at which the impact of the climate crisis will be neither gradual or reversible. Things are heating up in more ways than one.

We don't have to look farther for evidence than the local news to see dumpsters floating through the streets of Boston or hear the sad news from research biologists that not a single calf of the endangered right whale was sighted off our coast this spring. The count on animal that once filled our seas and fired up the economy of New England before the advent of fossil fuels has slipped below 500. Clearly my fifth-grade discovery that everything is connected has not yet made it to prime time.

This is my first Sunday back from sabbatical and the last 13 weeks have been full of so much rich experience. I attended presentations and lobby days and advocacy meetings. I read one book after another. I worked with the Climate Reality Project and MIP&L and 350.org and Climate Xchange. I soaked up the natural world in the wildlife refuges of Costa Rica. Downstairs during coffee hour you can see pictures of some of the animals and plants we met along the way. I watched the seasons change in the woods at Elm Bank and visited the Ornithology Lab at Cornell and Garden in the Woods in Framingham. I welcomed back the hummingbirds and planted veggies in the community garden. And I am so very grateful for the time that you made available to me to explore how hope for the future can grow out of who we are and what we believe as people of faith.

And this is what I discovered. I came to the conclusion that before the climate crisis is a political problem or an economic problem or a technological problem, it is a spiritual problem. I cannot speak for other faiths but for the last 1000 years in the Christian tradition we have put the emphasis on the wrong syllable. We have created a religion around the assumption that Jesus was Plan B. We have acted in our prayers and our practice as if the whole point of the incarnation – God's eternity folded into time and space

– was to produce a perfect victim whose blood was necessary to satisfy the debt we owed to a God who could not love imperfection. As Richard Rohr phrases it, we have turned the incarnation of Jesus Christ into a mop-up exercise demanded by human sinfulness.

Let me not mince words. I find this theology untenable on so many levels, but during the sabbatical I connected the dots and began to understand how it fractures the Trinity into Judge and Scapegoat and makes that powerful Spirit who brooded over primal waters of creation into a footnote or an irrelevant tag-along. We fractured the Trinity and traded transformation for the dynamics of guilt and shame.

I am back today to say that Christ is not Plan B. Christ has always been Plan A, not some contingency plan that was rolled out after Adam and Eve ate the apple. Christ was always Plan A. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him and without him was nothing made that was made.”

Could our sacred story possibly say it more emphatically? The Great Radiance which spilled out of the Big Bang permeates everything. We are all the stuff of stardust. We are all the product of the amazing ability of a single-cell that millions and millions of years ago figured out how to translate the energy of the sun into sugar and oxygen.

To understand Jesus as Plan B fractures the Trinity and turns faith into a bargaining exercise with a God who needs to be placated instead of loved. Not only does it set us off and running on the hamster wheel of guilt and shame, it also splinters the universe, erasing our common origin and separating us from the awareness that in God, everything lives and moves and has its being because God is in everything. God is the soil contaminated by pesticides. God is the forest logged into a monoculture. God is the coral reef bleached by the rise in ocean temperature. God is the glacier calving into the sea. Everything is connected because that Great Radiance is part of all that is.

On this Pentecost Sunday, we heard again the promise of that the young will have visions and the old will dream dreams. It is hard to imagine a time in the unfolding of the universe when we have needed fresh visions and bold dreams more, because the climate crisis is not just a political problem or an economic problem or a technological problem. It is a spiritual problem. Our faith story has been appropriated and subverted to make the word “animal” a pejorative term and to justify the rape of the earth.

There is no Plan B and there never was. There is no Plan B and there is no Planet B. Plan and Planet are not just a clever coincidence of words. Those two propositions about Plan and Planet are conjoined. I cannot believe that we would allow this climate crisis to escalate any further if we truly comprehended what it means that Christ is Plan A, that the Word that was from the beginning is part of you and part of me, part of redwoods and desert cactus and alpine meadows and hummingbirds and oceans and rivers and wheat fields and sunsets. The universe is not just a stage for the human drama to play itself out. It is, as Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote:

“charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil...
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things...
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

I want to tell you just one story from sabbatical. It happened on the first night that we were in Tortuguero. Tortuguero is on the Caribbean coast. It is one of the rare spots on the planet where the leatherback and green turtles nest, and so the whole coast along their nesting sites is a protected wildlife refuge. There are no roads. Everything moves by water up and down the mangrove canals. In Tortuguero we stayed in screened cabins, open on both sides to the rainforest around us, with the howler monkeys to wake us in the morning and the tree frogs to sing us to sleep at night.

Sunset comes early because Costa Rica is so close to the equator. So, it was already getting dark on the first evening when we came back to our cabins from dinner. As we walked down the path to our cabins, Alex pointed up to something in the canopy. At first, I couldn't tell what she was pointing at. Once I saw it and it was everywhere. Glowing lights were swooping and darting through the treetops. The canopy above us looked like a convention center for a gathering of "Tinkerbells." They were fireflies, but no offense to our local species, they were brighter and faster than anything that has ever turned up in my backyard. I don't know how long we all stood there looking up. It was mesmerizing. It was magical. It was God showing off.

Anybody who notices the world must want to save it. That's where we began worship this morning. Anybody who notices the world must want to save it. Noticing is where we begin – giving up on Plan B and seeing what we can see if you look through the lens of Plan A, seeing what we see through the lens of God as that Great Radiance spilling out to create time and space and everything that it is contained by time and space. Once we steep our spirits in this awareness, we will know what we must do to reverse the crisis we face. And just like that first Pentecost, nobody will be able to stop us. Amen.