

1

Each morning as I awake, I go through the motions of my morning routine. You probably have similar patterns in your life, things that you do each day when you greet the morning. After making a necessary stop in the bathroom, I let the dogs outside to take care of their business. I make a cup of coffee to jump start my day. I turn on my computer to check emails or Facebook messages from you or my students from McKendree. I take a shower, brush my teeth, and prepare to get in my truck to come here.

As I thought about my words for this week, knowing Earth Day is tomorrow, I had originally thought about talking about how my morning routine impacts the Earth, my so-called “ecological footprint” and how we could together green our routines by thinking about our impact on the world throughout the day and reduce our impact on the environment.¹

I was going to reflect on how my logging into my computer with 250 million other internet users impacts the earth as we depend on the data centers

running servers 24/7, sometimes with 90 percent of the energy wasted. I then remembered that I had turned off my computer in the evening, knowing that I was trying to cut down on some electric consumption.

As I used my laptop computer that I purchased last year to replace my old one, I thought about the 30 million outdated computers that are discarded each year, with only 15-20 percent of them recycled. And then I thought of those who will take outdated electrical components this Wednesday to a recycling drive at the university where I teach. I have a box of items, grateful that this service is provided to reduce some of the waste.

As I drank my cup of coffee, I thought about the large portion of tropical forests that may have been cut down in order to grow the coffee beans, possibly grown from a hybrid developed 20 years ago that grows in the sun rather than in the shade. I thought of all the birds and wildlife that may have been displaced just because farmers can now get higher yields of coffee in the full sun. I thought

2

about the fair trade coffee that I often drink to support the small-scale farmers, grateful that even buying coffee can help someone on the other side of the globe while caring for the environment.

I thought about the cotton used in the clothing that I wear, knowing that cotton is a thirsty crop; the fiber grown to make one t-shirt uses 400 gallons of water or 1800 gallons for a pair of jeans. I then thought of the clothes that many of us no longer wear that we can give away for someone who might be able to wear them, grateful that organizations help us reuse the basic necessity of clothing.

I was going to reflect on Psalm 23 and the imagery of still waters the writer must have walked alongside, the green pastures that were clean enough for him to lie down upon, and the lush valleys that he may have walked through during difficult times. It seems as though the writer was used to a green routine. Or I could have reflected on the passage from the book of Acts and how Tabitha used her skills with thread and cloth to create

clothing for the widows, and how they showed the beautiful handiwork to Peter when she had died. I sense that Tabitha had a green routine during her life.

I had so many ideas about words that I would speak this morning, and then the news reports began to fill the airwaves. All week people would ask me, “Did you hear about...?”

An explosion at a fertilizer plant in Texas, with many people dead, hundreds wounded, and many others unaccounted for.

A bomb threat discovered on social media by a parent in St. Louis in regard to several schools, which closed on Friday as a precaution.

Letters with deadly poison mailed to the President and a Senator.

A deadly earthquake in the area of Iran and Pakistan that killed over 30 people and left thousands homeless, and then another one Saturday in China where many have died and thousands injured.

3

Bombs going off near the finish line of the Boston Marathon, killing and wounding many innocent people. More news emerged with the suspects leading a chase while throwing more bombs out a hijacked car window. One suspect dead, another on the run, and one million people on lockdown in their homes as police went door-to-door searching houses—transportation systems stopped, schools and businesses closed, a baseball game postponed, armored cars filling the streets, and police walking the streets in what appeared to be an abandoned town. The suspect hiding under a tarp in a boat.

All week I kept asking: What just happened?

I would much rather talk about greening our routine, about caring for the Earth, than talk about the pain and destruction that has occurred this past week. Somehow, however, I think there is a connection between all these events—not cause and effect, but a relationship. There is an ancient teaching known as *ahimsa*, which means nonviolence. This teaching refers to how we

humans treat one another, but it goes beyond that to include the rest of creation as well. 2700 years ago a wise teacher suggested, “One who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, air, fire, water, and vegetation, disregards his own existence that is entwined with them.”

Another saying emerged from this teaching, “All life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence.”²

Some scientists today, thousands of years after these words of wisdom, interpret findings in modern quantum physics as also suggesting that everything is interconnected.

Whether from ancient wisdom or modern science, I think many of us sense that when something tragic happens in one part of the world, the trauma affects our lives. Oftentimes I feel as though I want to do something, but then I feel overwhelmed, especially this past week as one event after another occurred. That may lead some of us to want to ignore everything happening

④

around us, to want to try and avoid the impact of the swirling events.

And yet, the pages of the biblical story are filled with pain and sorrow, of wars and chaos, of agony and shattered dreams. The writers did not turn their eyes or their pens away from the realities of the world. Those who lived faithful lives before us faced endless tragedies, and somehow they continued to proclaim a message of hope.

Somehow those ancient writers knew that God was present in the midst of their struggles. God was there as they escaped during the Exodus and found a land of freedom. God was there as they were forced into Exile and awaited for decades to return home. God was there when those in power hung Jesus on a cross until he died a painful death. God was there in the streets of Boston this past week, in the fires of Texas, in the shaking of the ground in

Pakistan and China. And God is here with each of us, inviting us to bring hope and healing to the world. I'm beginning to wonder if greening our routine not only includes how we treat the earth, but how we treat one another as we sense our interconnectedness to all of life. Being green doesn't belong to politicians lobbying for votes or marketers trying to get us to buy their products. Instead, I think the notion of being green belongs to people of faith who strive to offer hope to the world, for as we care for creation, we care for one another; as we pray for those far away and those nearby who experience the trauma of violence, we pray for peace for our sisters and brothers. May we each find ways to include in our daily routine words of hope and actions of peace for the world.

¹ Following ecological data from Earth Day Sunday 2013 resource by Eco-Justice Program, National Council of Churches USA, www.nccecojustice.org.

² Manish Shah, "Respecting the Earth, Our Common Home," *Faith in Place newsletter*, Winter 2013, p. 4.