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## Strength in Meekness - Creation Care on Earth Day – Lauren Speeth

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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, o Lord, our rock and our redeemer. O my soul, bless God! God, my God, how great you are, beautifully, gloriously robed, dressed up in sunshine. Isn't it a beautiful day to be alive? I think it is. Alive and breathing, and still able to care for this beautiful blue marble of ours.

Happy Earth Day everyone. I see some of you have brought recyclable bottles today. Good for you! Have you heard the one about the recycling bin with a sign that said, "Empty water bottles here"? Pretty soon the bin was full of water.

Jesus concerned himself with the water, and the fish. He noticed the lilies in the field, the fig trees, the mustard seeds. He took the time to pray, outside, in the garden. Jesus cared, about creation. Jesus' presence dwelling among us surely cares about Earth day, and our efforts towards creation care.

We're so fortunate to live in a state where we mostly don't have to fight each other about climate denial. I think the tide is turning on such denial, everywhere. I heard something funny though. Comedian Lewis Black isn't so sure he believes in global warming anymore, now that George Bush said he believes in it. But the good news is that George Bush is on board, and that on some level we all know something's happening, so denial isn't an option, only rejection. Rejection comes from fear, which comes from a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. But we must never say there is no hope and we must never say we are alone without help, because we – beloved sons and daughters of God – need to remember a greater and more loving truth.

Speaking of truth, have you seen *An Inconvenient Truth*, the film about climate change? Some of you know that I used to live in India when I was a child. So, when I saw a woman getting stuck in a melting road in the film *An Inconvenient Sequel* last year something inside me rose up, and I was so moved, I had to go get some training in climate leadership, in Pittsburgh. It was so moving to me, to hear the mayor of Pittsburgh, once a dying city, tell us about all the new smart and climate friendly initiatives there. There is so much hope today, but you must know where to look.

Want some more hope? A friend of mine named Father John Dear just wrote a book connecting the third Beatitude – *blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth* – with creation care. Really, he uses an active term... march on you meek ones, and you'll inherit the planet. Why is it, he wondered, that Jesus connected meekness and the promise of earth inheritance, right there, in the Gospel of Matthew 5, 5, and, what's meekness all about, anyway?

In Greek, is *Praus* (*prah-ooos*) and that really means strength... under control. The word used in an ecumenical German Bible means nonviolent, and yet *praus* is an ancient military term describing a trained and skilled war horse that is no longer wild but is now steady... ready and willing to accept guidance and direction. The philosopher Aristotle took the word to mean a balance point between



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cowardice and recklessness. Again, the image is balanced. Steady. This is important, because father John points out that the future of our very earth hangs in the balance. I think he may be right, and why his message calling us to action is so timely, today, Earth Day.

Words, words, words. Is meekness the only troublesome word in the Bible when it comes to creation care? I can think of two others, right off the first page. You're with me, right? Genesis, where it tells us to "*fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion...*" Pretty combative stuff. How does that go along with nonviolent creation care?

A rabbi friend once told me, when a word is troubling or too easily leads to self-justifying bad-behavior, go look deeper. That's so very wise, don't you agree? It turns out to be helpful here. Subdue – *kabash* in Hebrew – means subdue or enslave. It can even have connotations of force or molest, but only against the hostile and deadly parts. So, we're not supposed to behave in ways that remind us of molest or rape when it comes to the life-giving parts of the earth. There's a joke about global warming being mankind's revenge on glaciers for the iceberg that sank the titanic – it's funny but it's also violent. Revenge. That's not going to move us towards the blessedness promised us in that third Beatitude of Jesus.

What about that second word, dominion? That's *radab* in Hebrew, and yes, it connotes kingly ruling, but when we look to the Psalmist's description of a ruler, we hear described one who delivers the needy when they call, helper of the poor and those who have no helper to whom to turn.

Okay, great. Now, can Hebrew shine a light for us on the word meek? Oh yes! That word in Hebrew is *anavim* from *anav* meaning lowly or humble. But you'd be surprised whom the Bible calls *anav*. The great leader Moses, the one chosen to lead his people into the promised land. In Numbers 12:3, we read: *Now the man Moses was meode anav. Very meek. more than any man who was on the face of the earth.*"

It's so interesting to think of Moses in this way. Moses, the person who stood up to the mighty Pharaoh. Moses who brought down plagues. Moses who parted the waters and eventually his people – because of Moses – did indeed inherit their little bit of earth. He saw the promised land from the mountain top. He didn't get there with them, but that didn't stop him. He kept going.

In taking seriously the third Beatitude, in practicing meekness as we march on following God to the best of our understanding, we're answering the call of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus demonstrated meekness perfectly, always doing the will of God the Father. Imagine having your strength under control, even to the cross. That's the purest, most perfect reflection of God, in pure self-giving generous-hearted leadership. It helps, to try to follow Jesus' loving example, even towards our enemies. After all, you can't be an angry peace activist. It just doesn't follow.

The good news is, even if we try and fail, it's worth the attempt. Whenever we engage with the world, trying to transform it for the better, we ourselves will be transformed by the effort. And as my friend Father John reminded me recently, nobody knows what the tipping point will be. It's all important – every little thing we do – from recycling to reusing and repurposing. From the folks who brought their metal water bottles today to the people who are working to get plastic straws banned because



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they choke turtles to those who pick up trash on ocean cleanup day to the ones who write their leaders or pray for them or take other small steps. A few little things every day, add up to a sea change. I like to say never underestimate your ripple.

At the end of the day we may only get to the mountain top to glimpse promised land that our children's children will someday inherit. We'll know it's going to be better than it would have been, without our collective striving. And then, we can surely say together with the psalmist, *O my soul, bless God.* Amen.



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