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I took a trip this past week that involved a connection flight from Madison to Milwaukee. As some of you know (and as all could well imagine), being a mere 75 mile flight means you never get far off the ground before making the descent. This quick trip in the air gives those with a window seat a great view of the land we call home. As I enjoyed the birds-eye view of the many fields that largely make up southern Wisconsin, I was impressed with both the hard work of the farmers below and the quantity of the harvest that comes from this creation we enjoy.

Now, I do not claim to know a lot about agriculture, but I am aware that it has become a rather complicated industry thanks to government subsidies, commercial demand, lending and environmental practices, and legislation regarding all of the above. While a fly-over of the harvest raises some questions about those issues for me as a citizen and neighbor to many small farms, I will leave those matters to others with more knowledge on the subject than I, and stick to my reflections as a pastor and theologian. I do, however, encourage thought and dialog on those important issues.

Flying over the patchwork of brown and yellow and watching the dust rise behind the machines gathering and carrying away the bounty of our neighboring farms was fascinating for me. It has given me a new perspective and appreciation for how much our earth can care for us when we care for it. Indeed, we are blessed by God's creation and its many gifts that sustain us and the lives of all God's creatures. While the Scriptures offer many perspectives and images of God's work in creation, they consistently speak of the goodness of what God has made and call us to care for creation with thanksgiving and praise to its Creator. The Scriptures (specifically in the books of the prophets) also speak of the ways humanity has failed to do so.

History and current events serve to show us that we continue to struggle in caring for the creation that sustains our lives. Since the dawn of the industrialization age, we have often put our needs above creation's – taking what resources we like with less regard for the health of the earth and its environments. As global population and consumption continue to grow, the work of healing the earth has become more and more difficult. These are pretty stark realities in which we all play a part, but we (as well as creation) are not without hope.

The scriptural witness reminds us that God hears the cry of creation and tends to its care. God has not left humanity or creation to their own devices, but rather, God commits to the renewal of all life and promises freedom from captivity of death, decay and destruction. (Colossians 1:15-20; 2 Peter 3:13) God is at work for us and for creation. Just as God's Spirit and Word brought forth life in the beginning, God breathes and speaks grace and hope into our world today. Trusting in God's power, mercy and love for us and for creation, we are free from the brokenness of our neglect and misuse of creation. We are free from the fear that it is too late to heal the earth. We are free from the notion that we cannot make a difference. God's mercy frees us to join in God's work for the renewal of creation, to bring about the future God has promised. Indeed, something worthy of thanksgiving and praise!

How do you respond to such a gift? In what ways do you feel called to join with others in God's work of renewal? In this season of harvest, I invite you to consider how you, with your friends/neighbors/family, might care with thanksgiving and praise for the creation that cares for you. I pray that you find joy and wholeness in doing so!

Grace and Peace,

Peder Johanson