



## Iowa IPL Earth Words Sermon Contest Runner-Up

### “The Measure of Creation”

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“But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not peddlers of God’s word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence.” *2 Corinthians 2:14-17*

If you were God, how would you measure creation? How would you, the Designer and Creator of All Things, measure what you had made? How would you, thousands of years, or maybe only seconds later, determine the measure of all that you had created?

This past week, a man stopped by West Branch Friends with an odd looking instrument. He juttet it into the ground, in our front churchyard, and took a “core sample” – a measurement of the soil content - in order to know what kind of drainage requirements we’d need for our Rain Garden project. If that man were God, how would this Earth, this Eden, this *Garden of God*, take its measure? What would its sample reveal?

I don’t know. I cannot tell you, except to say that God the Creator, created this world to reflect who God is – whole, perfect, good, and holy. The Garden into which we were born – Eden – was whole, perfect, good, and holy. I would guess that *this* is the standard against which God measures creation.

*Christ* was God-out-of-doors! He was God in a farm field, God in a fishing boat, God on a hillside, God in a garden. Christ was God in a temple, God at a wedding, God in a stable, God in an Upper Room, but always as a guest...never as a permanent occupant. He never had a place of his own to lay his head. His life was lived in all Creation – *for* all Creation. Christ was never a resident – except in other peoples’ lives and hearts. This is how God made Godself known. *If Creation itself – all that was whole, perfect, good, and holy - was not enough, then the Creator would speak through the Christ.*

When we the created, at our convincement, recognize and experience the inward birth of the Creator, we begin to measure Creation just as the Creator does. Our Earth, our Garden of God, begins to look more and more like Eden. And we begin to recognize God-out-of-doors...in soil, sea, and sky. In a journal entry, Fox once wrote, “...I discerned the groans of the spirit, which did open me, and made intercession to God, in which spirit is *the true waiting upon God* for the redemption of the body *and of the whole creation.*” Redeeming Adam wasn’t enough. Fox thought, preached, and practiced the importance of God’s redemption of the *whole* of creation.

George Fox discovered that we belong, and can return to, the Garden of God. Our journey takes us from convincement to perfection...we move in redemptive ways, discovering again our relationship with God,

through the light of the Spirit, as the Inward Teacher – Christ Himself – leads us toward Eden. And *that* is where Fox finds himself in the quote given in your bulletin today (Found Below). He has been convinced. He has followed God. He has moved in the Spirit of Christ. And he finds himself stepping back into the Garden of Eden. He is walking through the flaming sword, right past the cherubim standing watch at the eastern entrance, guarding the pathway to the tree of life. Look at what Fox says:

“Then the work of the Lord went forward, and many were turned from the darkness to the light within the compass of these three years, 1646, 1647, and 1648. And divers meetings of Friends, in several places, were then gathered to God’s teaching, by his light, spirit, and power; for the Lord’s power brake forth more and more wonderfully.

Now was I come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all the creation gave another *smell* unto me than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness, and innocency, and righteousness, being *renewed up* into the image of God by Christ Jesus, so that I say I was come up to the state of Adam, which he was in before he fell. The creation was opened to me...”

George Fox, 1648 [p.27]

*Creation gave a new smell...* We know a bit of what that’s like – the scent of the world after a fresh rain, the cacophony of spring flowers, the deep aroma of upturned earth when we’re kneeling in it, preparing it for planting...

Ten years after Christ was crucified, the Roman Emperor Claudius conquered Britain – the land that some thousand years later would give birth to George Fox and the Society of Friends. The Corinthians would have remembered it well. They would have known the Roman custom of military victory processions through their great cities. Incense was burned in these triumphal processions. The fragrance of victory, the smell of world dominance wafted over the crowd as soldiers passed by.

Paul uses that olfactory image to innervate his teaching to the Corinthians, and to us. Just as I cannot forget the smell of the boxwood hedge out in front of my Grandmother’s house, neither could the Corinthians forget the smell of that triumphal incense. But Paul puts *us* in the procession. And now we are asked to consider the procession itself...do we follow the Emperor or the Creator? Do we worship Claudius or the Christ? Dominance or redemption? What aroma do we leave in our wake? Is it the fragrance that comes from *knowing* the Creator, or is it the scent of subjection to those who usurp the place of the Creator? One brings life, while the other brings death.

Are we mindful of these things? Do we consider that God the Creator, created this world to reflect who God is – whole, perfect, good, and holy. Do we ask ourselves if our lives affect all of creation in ways that are whole, perfect, good, and holy? Is the redemption of creation important to us, or do we only want our own? Do we redeem only those parts of creation that affect us personally, or does *all* of creation merit redemption? Do we pay attention to the fragrance – the smell – of creation, as we move toward Eden?

God is revealed in bubbling streams, standing corn, starlit skies, parched deserts, broken landforms, and dry lakebeds. God is revealed to us more and more in the measure of *all* creation. Fox writes, “It is the great love of God to make a *wilderness* of that which is pleasant to the outward eye and fleshly mind; and to make a fruitful field of a *barren* wilderness. *This* is the great work of God.” [p.13] Do we attend to that work?

## **Bulletin Quotation Entries for 4-25-2010**

“Now was I come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness, and innocency, and righteousness, being renewed up into the image of God by Christ Jesus, so that I say I was come up to the state of Adam which he was in before he fell. The creation was opened to me, and it was showed me how all things had their names given them according to their nature and virtue. And I was at a stand in my mind whether I should practise physic for the good of mankind, seeing the nature and virtues of the creatures were so opened to me by the Lord. But I was immediately taken up in spirit, to see into another or more steadfast state than Adam’s in innocency, even into a state in Christ Jesus, that should never fall. And the Lord showed me that such as were faithful to him in the power and light of Christ should come up into that state in which Adam was before he fell, in which the admirable works of the creation, and the virtues thereof, may be known, through the openings of that divine Word of wisdom and power by which they were made.”

*George Fox, 1648 [p. 27] (full quotation)*

“Are you concerned for responsible use of natural resources and their nurture for future generations? Do you try to avoid wasteful consumption and pollution? Do you seek to preserve the beauty and balance of God's world? “

*Query #12, Baltimore Yearly Meeting; FUM*