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## *Fruit, Fossil Fuels, and Rogation*

**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**  
**The Sixth Sunday of Easter**

*Jesus said, "I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last." John 15.16*

I saw three entire movies this past week, which is way beyond my average. Yes, one of the movies I saw was *The Da Vinci Code*; but it was not the most important one.

The other two were more important. I was invited to the pre-screening of two different movies about the environment, about global warming, and about our care of the earth. I noted that one of the movies was probably directed toward democrats and liberals. And the other, strangely enough, was probably directed toward republicans and evangelicals. One was titled *An Inconvenient Truth*, featuring Al Gore; and the other was titled *The Great Warming*, featuring the National Association of Evangelicals. But they had a similar message: global warming is a reality, and the world's wanton over-use of carbon-based, fossil fuels for energy is a reality.

I urge folks to see either movie, whenever they appear. But this morning, I also urge us to do something else. I want us not to focus on movies and politics. I suggest that we simply look around. I want us to look at the earth itself, to go outside and observe. Watch and note just what kind of fruit we are producing in the world. Look at the world like we once did long ago.

Way back in 1559, the Anglican Book of Common Prayer required a particular prayer to be read in all Anglican churches on this day, the Sunday before Ascension Day, and on this coming Monday, this Tuesday, and this Wednesday. Some of the more historical among you this morning might know that these days in the church year are known as "rogation days."

In the pre-industrial world, the Church noted with great care the days we should pray for good planting and good harvest, the days we should pray for the earth. The word "rogation" comes from the Latin word, "rogare," which means "to ask." In the Christian Church, rogation days were set aside for special prayer for the fruit of the earth.

It is a sad pity, a tragedy really, that our industrial and even post-industrial society pays such little attention to that prayer. I preach this morning that we return to those roots, that we return to these days, always just before the Feast of the Ascension, as rogation days.

Let me read this particular prayer, the one required by Queen Elizabeth in 1559. Listen to its beauty and truth:

"Almighty God, who has blessed the earth that it should be fruitful and bring forth everything that is necessary for the life of man, and has commanded us to work with quietness and eat our own bread; bless us in all our labors and grant us such seasonable weather that we may gather in the fruits of the earth and ever rejoice in thy goodness to the praise of thy holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

We have a couple of revisions of that prayer in the present prayer book, but they do not match the glory of that one. God has blessed the earth, that it should be fruitful!

In 1559, the Anglican Church required something else this time of year. The Church required a procession around the church. The entire parish was meant to go outside and walk around the church during this week, rogationtide.

It's time for us to take another look outside, too, to stop staying inside, cooped up, staring at screens and burning energy to stay cool, but to walk outside and observe the world.

What do we see? What kind of fruit do we see? Jesus says in today's gospel that he appointed us to bear fruit. He says earlier that he is true vine. What kind of vines do we see today? What kind of fruit do we see?

Let's use science! Science is meant to help us see the particulars of God's creation. And science, pure observation, tells us that some of our fruit is not good. We are over-consuming the ocean's fisheries. We are over-consuming fossil fuels. We are steadily raising the average temperature of the earth itself.

"I appointed you to bear fruit," Jesus says. Is this the fruit we are supposed to produce?

"Fruit" can mean many things in the Bible, can't it? One of my favorite passages of scripture is Galatians 5.22-23. St. Paul speaks against the works of the flesh by contrasting the beautiful fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Their opposites produce the bad fruit of poverty and despair.

But let us consider literal fruit of the earth. What is being spawned on this earth through our own actions? Our overuse of fossil fuels has led to a massive increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Global warming is a reality. If our earth heats up too much, it will no longer sustain the careful equilibrium that has led to life as we have known it.

Now, I am not a "doom and gloom" environmentalist. Because I am a Christian, I have hope. I believe God does work through humanity to save the earth, not to destroy it. We human beings have borne some good environmental fruit in the recent past. Consider how the hole in the ozone layer was reduced when we restricted the use of chloroflourocarbons, (cfc's). Consider that even now several Cathedral parishioners are developing an organic green market to be on our campus.

I believe we can learn to watch the world. We can learn to watch over, and care for, the world. We can learn to bear good fruit. We can learn to use less energy, and more renewable sources of energy. That education is part of our care of the earth.

Now, some of you might be saying about this moment. Why on earth should the church be preaching environmentalism. Why should the preacher be talking about the over-consumption of fossil fuels?

Quite simply, because the church is in the business of salvation. Jesus says in John 3.16, "For God so loved the world," That means "the world!" Not just the people in the world. God wants to save not just you and me, but the world itself.

Salvation is not meant to be merely personal. It means salvation of others as well. And ultimately, salvation also refers to this very earth itself, to our land and air and water, all that sustains life here.

Rogation comes from the Latin verb, rogare, which means "to ask." Our ancestors made sure they asked their gracious God for fair and seasonable weather, for good planting and harvest.

But today, I believe we must ask someone else. Rogation today ought to mean asking one another for seasonable weather and harvest. We should be asking ourselves to care better for the earth. We should be asking ourselves not to be such wanton polluters of our air and water.

Jesus said, "I have appointed you to bear fruit, fruit that will last." I want to pray the 1559 prayer again, but this time considering that humanity is not the center of the world. The world was not made merely for our use and abuse. We were made for the world, to co-exist with all of God's creation to the glory of God.

"Almighty God, who has blessed the earth that it should be fruitful and bring forth everything that is necessary for life, and has commanded us to work with quietness and eat our own bread; bless us in all our labors and grant us such seasonable weather that we may produce the fruits of the earth and ever rejoice in thy goodness to the praise of thy holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

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