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The Episcopal Church of St. Benedict
Easter 6 / Rogation Sunday – May 9, 2010
Deuteronomy 11:10-15

This is the Sixth Sunday of Easter and Christians have been processing around their towns and churches on this day since the fifth century. Rogation Sunday means blessing Sunday – a holy day for blessing the crops, the land, and all the natural world that was around a parish. Processions included incense and holy water, and people would make a circuit of their entire village. This was called “beating the bounds” – or walking the boundaries. Maybe they would stop for a few prayers or sermons along the way. I’ve heard that sometimes they’d bring little cakes that people would throw down the hillsides.

What would it be like if we followed Suzette, Chris, and Matthew all around Bolingbrook? That would be a pretty long walk, first of all. But what would we see? What would be bless? a few fields of crops, the DuPage River, woods, a trout farm, wetlands, bridges, a quarry, and lots of lawns and gardens. That’s not so different from what our ancestors would’ve seen, even a hundred years ago, if they walked around their communities. We’d bless schools, churches, homes – those things aren’t so different either. But today we’d also be blessing parking lots, restaurants, stores and malls, an airport, movie theaters, water towers, cell phone towers, flood control reservoirs, interstate highways... These are all a part of our parish. They’re all a part of the piece of God’s Creation that we live in.

Some people might say that we have cut ourselves off from Nature because of things like parking lots, lawns, highways, the fact that we can buy food from the grocery store instead of having to grow it and process it ourselves. But how can we be cut off entirely from something that we’re a part of? Human beings are a part of Creation; the book of Genesis doesn’t have a separate chapter set aside for human beings – we’re part of the whole big story. We’re there right alongside the fish, birds, and oceans. Now God didn’t create cell phone towers and highways in the story of Genesis, but because human beings created them, they are also part of Creation. We should still celebrate them. Technology, industry, art... If it wasn’t such a long walk, we’d go bless all those things today, too!

What we share in common with the Christians who blessed their churches and land centuries ago, (while not malls or airports), is that we have these things only by the grace of God. We can take care of what we’ve been given, maintain our buildings, make sure we are living in a way that’s sustainable, think not only of ourselves, but of the ecosystems and creatures we live alongside and how our lives are tied together.

Use our cellphones, highways, and technology to make the world a better place, instead of just to surround ourselves with a bubble information and entertainment so that we can't see the needs of other around us or hear the voices of people who are being unfairly treated.

We can also make mistakes: we buy too much that's disposable and we fill up our landfills, we don't treat the animals we eat very well, we want cheap food without thinking about what long-term effects all those money-savings methods might have on our land or our bodies or our water supplies.

Around our neighborhoods, how are the chemicals we use in our homes and gardens affecting us?

Are we letting technology make us into selfish people? Into people who don't know how good we have it? Into people who are blind to our neighbors who might need our help?

In Deuteronomy, God said to the Israelites out in the desert, "yes, I'm sending you to the Promised Land, but guess what? There are some conditions."

In Leviticus and Deuteronomy, God lays out a way of life for the Israelites – what they should eat, how they should live together, and how they should worship.

This was the real estate deal: you get to live fruitfully and abundantly in the Promised Land IF you follow the commandments.

This is not an interest-free mortgage. Foreclosure is not impossible.

Isn't the same true for us, really? We are responsible for what God has given us.

For the land, the water, the sky, and the animals, for the technology, our buildings, and all the shopping opportunities we have!!!

These aren't just free gifts with no moral consequences.

How we use them affects our neighbors, and it also affects who we are as people.

Our community – our piece of God's Creation – is our responsibility.

When we will bless our building and our grounds,
we will bless them because we are thankful for them.

We will bless them because they are good gifts from God.

But we are also blessing them because every year we should remind ourselves that they aren't ours for free.

They are the fruit of our labor and our generosity.

And they come with a real estate contract

(yes, there is one with Harris Bank! but there is another one with God):

love the Lord your God, and serve God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Let us do good ministry in this place, let us worship well and with our whole hearts, let us welcome all people.

Let us dwell in this place -- in this church, in our homes and communities --

and be good stewards of them, believing God's love is real and that the way we live our lives makes a difference to all of Creation.

Amen.