

World Maritime Day  
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## **Intl Maritime Organization's response to current environmental challenges**

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I was in Puerto Rico last week to visit the Episcopal church there, and I flew back early Sunday evening. As our plane left the island, I watched the sunset for 30 minutes through the towering clouds, as the sun painted everything – sky, clouds, and sea – in stunning and changing color. That unearthly display was the result of clear air and increasing altitude – we never get to see skies quite so blue or clouds so deeply salmon colored at sea level. It was on a different kind of vessel, in another ocean, and the opposite end of the day, but it was a powerful reminder of a sunrise I watched 30 years ago on a research vessel at sea north of Hawaii. There were flying fish on the deck, the same kind of towering pillars of clouds, but the colors were pastel rather than passionate. The rude poem I wrote was no match for Kipling's words, but it grew out of the same sense of awe that pushed him to talk about the dawn that "comes up like thunder over China 'cross the Bay..." (*Mandalay*).

It is the same kind of wonder the psalmist talks about – the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep. That sense of wonder draws many of us to the sea, the same pull that drew another poet: "I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and sky" [John Masefield, *Sea Fever*]. That wonder lies behind the pull that continues to send some "down to the sea in ships, to ply their trade in deep waters."

The wonders of God's good creation, and the need we still have to make our living by the sweat of our brow, bring us here today to give thanks for the ministry of mariners, to pray for their safety, and to encourage all of us to care even more deeply for this wondrous planet on which we dwell.

That sense of awe at creation is an invitation into relationship with the creator. I think there's a reason why Jesus started with fisherfolk, with guys who knew what it was like to suffer sun and wind and storm at sea, to revel in the lambent light of dawn, and to put up with a way of life that one day puts overwhelming abundance in the net and the next day nothing. Those who go to sea know that life is unpredictable, that the world is far larger than anything a human being can control, and that somehow all of it is shot through with unutterable beauty and grace.

Awe is a basic religious response, and if it's not squelched it can produce a deep desire for relationship – we go looking for more. Right after Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James and John, he launches out into Galilee, teaching, telling people the good news of God's presence, and healing them in body and mind. Presumably he's teaching those four fishermen at the same time: here, God has created this wondrous earth and all its inhabitants, and if you're going to follow me, then your job is to teach and heal, and help put everything back into right relationship.

Jews and Christians haven't spent a lot of time and energy talking about it in recent centuries, but a significant part of that work of putting things back into right relationship has to do with this planet and all of its inhabitants, human and not. There are some wonderful images in the Hebrew prophets that talk about what a healed earth looks like – water springing up in the desert, lion and lamb living together without one of them seeing the other as dinner, or the sea roaring out its praise of the Lord.

The International Maritime Organization's focus this year is on healing the transportation base on which the whole maritime industry depends – or, rather, floats. That watery support has been polluted with oil and sewage, plastic and old ships, and the air above it is increasingly filled with gases that are contributing to warming the whole planet. The living communities that depend on the ocean are suffering not just from pollution, but from overfishing, shifting chemistry, calcification (or profound localized warming) and changing weather patterns that are at least partly the result of planetary warming. Others who depend on the oceans, like native subsistence fishing communities, are going hungry because factory trawlers have exhausted their food source. Other human communities will likely lose their traditional homelands as sea level rises in the coming decades. There are island nations in the South Pacific whose average height above sea level is only six feet – and the dry land on which they dwell is beginning to shrink.

Jesus called those disciples, as he continues to call us, to tell people not only that God is among us and seeking relationship with us, but that we have something to do in response – to heal, cure, restore, make whole. Salvation, in its fullest sense, means just that – the wholeness, healing, and holiness of human beings in their fullness, but also the healing and restoration of all of creation. Over and over again we are reminded that as long as some are suffering, none of us can really be whole. Our salvation only comes with the salvation of all.

You and I have the ability to begin to heal this earth. When the first human beings were charged with dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every living thing that moves on the earth, God did not intend for us to abuse those gifts, but to use and care well for them, so that they might continue to be a blessing for all God's creation. Our own lives, and those of our descendants, depend on how we care for the whole. Will we bless God in our stewardship of this earth, and bless all its inhabitants in the process? Or will we ignore our neighbors and foul this watery garden?

Peter and Andrew, James and John, and all the fishing fools who followed them, went down to the sea in ships, and plied their trade there, out of reverence for what God has created. Those disciples went fishing for people for the same reason – out of the reverent sense that God has blessed us and asks us to heal what is ill and broken. Healing the human race and all of creation means enough to eat – food that often comes in ships or from the sea itself – it means medical care and pharmaceuticals, drugs that may come from the riches of the sea – it means clean air to breathe and dignified employment and enough education to let us fall in love with learning about the wonders of this world. Above all, healing the world means the kind of peaceful community that can emerge only when all are fed, and whole, and living in right relationship with their neighbor. Right use of the riches of creation can bring peace and healing to the whole earth. It is blessed and entirely possible work. May we dream that dream of a sea that can roar out its blessing! May we dream of a world where all know God's peace and wholeness.

Deep peace of the running wave to you.  
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.  
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.  
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.  
Deep peace of the Son of Peace to you.

– Fiona Macleod

In the full tide of the day and in its ebbing,  
In the rising of the sun and its setting,  
The mighty God be with you  
The loving God protect you  
The holy God guide you  
And the blessing...

– David Adam, *The Open Gate*