

Sermon
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Creation Sunday April 25, 2010

Genesis 1:24-31; Psalm 24; Revelation 21:1-5, 22:1-5; John 12:44-50

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, Amen.

This is Creation Sunday, so I'm going to preach about garbage...manure...and compost...and...worms. Just kidding.

Here are some ways that we can help the planet. You must adopt them today.

Give up electricity

We could do all right without heat in the winter, or air conditioning in the summer. On the commune, we simply huddle together to keep warm. When it's hot, we weave reeds together to make fans.

Running water

Personal hygiene may be over rated.

Travel by foot

Ask yourself this: Do you really need to go somewhere that is too far away to walk?

Okay, so you're not going to go for those suggestions.

As much as I am tempted to trot out my tree-hugger, liberal status given me by my good conservative friends, many of whom are sitting up there in the choir, I am not here to tell you to stop global warming or not to drill oil offshore or even to recycle. Those specific decisions must be yours. If you have doubts and need suggestions, we have a wonderful Green Team who will be more than happy to provide you with the details for saving the environment.

I am here to remind you, to remind all of us, that whatever needs to be done to heal the earth, we must do it. We must do it because the earth has been entrusted to us. We must do it because it cannot be a political issue. It's an issue of stewardship. From a poem:

*Can we imagine the fullness of life?
Or have we become tired of hope?
From too much love of living.
Can we begin again
To love the earth
To imagine the fullness of life?
Can we begin
To imagine justice and mercy for the earth?
Can we envision
How it might be
To live as caretakers for beast and flower,
Not as oppressors.
Can we?*

Jesus said, "...for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." Perhaps we think that he meant saving the souls of people and nothing else. But what if Jesus were speaking of the whole world – people, animals, trees, water and air – everything that inhabits the world. What if?

We are the stewards of the earth, not the animals. This is biblical. The heated rhetoric about global warming and disagreements on the role of government have distracted us, I think, from our responsibility, from the church's responsibility, to care for God's creation. It isn't, it shouldn't be a political issue; it is an issue of stewardship; it is also discipleship. From the book of Daniel in the Old Testament:

There was a tree at the centre of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew great and strong; its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the ends of the whole earth. Its foliage was beautiful; its fruit abundant and it provided food for all. The animals of the field found shade under it; the birds of the air nested in its branches, and from it all living beings were fed.

This almost sounds like the Garden of Eden, doesn't it? We heard in Genesis today that we are to have dominion over the earth. I believe that in saying this God meant that we are the keepers of the earth. We are to care for and guard the earth. What an awesome responsibility that is! Ironically, the best models today for stewards and stewardship come from, of all places, the financial world.

Managers of investment portfolios, trust funds, or charitable foundations are stewards of our money. They have been entrusted with valuable assets of others to manage.

The fund manager or the steward -- has a legal obligation to work for the specified goals for us, the fund owners. If the steward has a different idea for how to manage things, those plans must be approved by us, the owners of the assets.

The steward may not dip into the assets for his or her own use. That sort of misappropriation of funds is called "embezzlement" and is a major crime.

So what does this have to do with stewardship of the earth? We are the stewards or fund managers. God is the owner of the accounts we manage. God has entrusted us with this holy responsibility for keeping his creation as he created it. We cannot therefore misappropriate what God has been given to us to care for.

Psalm 24 says, "the earth is the Lord's." We said that today. Is it then possible for us to begin to grasp the notion that God's creation does not belong to us as individuals, nations, corporations, or even to us as a species? It is, in fact, not ours to use and abuse as we please.

When I was a child, we used to go on trips in the car, especially from Gainesville, Georgia, where I grew up, to Atlanta. We would drink coke and throw the bottles out the car window. We threw trash out the car window. That seems unimaginable now. That was so long ago, that those coke bottles would probably be antiques now if we could find them. The point is that no one thought back then about littering or recycling. So, in ignorance, I contributed to the problem in which we find ourselves today. But, we are no longer ignorant children, are we. Today, I am pretty careful to recycle. I'll bet almost all of us fill up to overflowing our large blue bin every two weeks. By the way, please remind Thomas Coates whenever you see him to remember to wash out his cans and put them in the recycle!

Here's a poem I found that unfortunately sounds a bit like me. Alas!

Consum'n' Human

Well I don't know, I usually take a latte,
No, no let's just drive, what d'ya say.
I traded the dinky little car for this SUV.
Lots'o' power & room, so you see
THAT thing! Just put it in the trash
I'll get another when I stop for cash.
Wait, did you see the show last night?
the Season Finale, nothing went right!
And then, oops hold on, it's my cell,
"Yes, Hello? What? oh, do tell,
me more, as I really want to know
as my life is always on the go.
Never a minute for a thing
not even to hear birds sing".
So forgive me please for I am only Human
And as I continue on, I am consum'n'!

But those of us who come from religious communities can make a profound contribution to the environmental cause when we stress the theme of stewardship above the theme of mindless consuming. To see ourselves as stewards of what God owns points us in very different directions than seeing "the earth and all that is in it" as our own property. **Stewardship is far more faithful than ownership as a way of relating to the earth.**

The *Episcopal Ecological Network (EpEN)* is a nationwide network within the Episcopal Church in the US that coordinates with a worldwide environmental movement within Episcopal churches. As such EpEN is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion with roots in the Celtic Spirituality of this tradition. The *EpEN* includes all concerned Episcopalians who are helping our Church assume a leadership role in the worldwide environmental movement, just as our Church leads in other peace and justice issues. This is a grassroots network of Episcopalians from around the US. EpEN helps individual churches advocate for protection of the environment, helping to preserve the sanctity of creation. EpEN also interacts with other Christian churches. There are materials online for people all over the country to access for prayers and actions. (The link is: <http://eenonline.org/>) On the pages of EpEN, you are provided information about political and social action in our church communities You can download the *EpEN* Starter Kit, and suggestions for activities during events such as Earth Day.

*But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air; and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and **they** will teach you... Who among all of these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In God's hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being.* Also from the Old Testament - Job 12:7-10

Where is the place you call holy? Is it this church? Your home? Where you vacation? Where is your holy place? For Jesus, it was the synagogue, but it was also the open air, the desert, the mountains, the trees, the places where birds and animals lived, the places where Jesus went to pray, to be alone, to refresh. Holy places.

From the Revelation reading today: *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there anymore.*

So let us work to make sure that we allow nothing on our beautiful earth to be accursed. We want crystal water and abundant crops. We want to heal the earth so that the earth may in time heal us.

From Deuteronomy: Moses spoke to the chosen people just before they were to set their feet on the Promised Land. *"I have set before you life and death ... therefore, choose life that you and your descendents may live."*

May our churches and our people have the courage and vision to proclaim that the earth, and all that is in it, is God's. Choose life!

Amen