

The Earth is the Lord's
Psalm 24
Genesis 1:27-31
June 3, 2020 – Second Sunday after Pentecost

For the past several years, I have always started my Sunday Message with the same prayer. Some have suggested that, for the sake of a little variety, I change that prayer; but it's sort of a signature to me. It's special, it's inclusive – asking that we hear God's words for us, at all times, in all places, whatever they may be; and that we will responded, that we will follow where God leads, follow with love and joy and peace. It's a request, and it's a commitment, a commitment to follow, a commitment to discipleship.

But the prayer starts with, "Lord, open our eyes to see the wonders of your creation." And so, today, during this outdoor service, I'd like to think about the beauty of this magnificent creation. Earth Day was a couple months ago, and I let it go by without a word, so today I'll make up for that.

Have you ever stood outside on a clear night and looked up at the sky and thought, "Wow!" Or maybe you've been in an even clearer sky, at sea or on a mountain top. Do you know that astronomers tell us there are more stars in the sky than grains of sand on the earth: multiple galaxies containing millions of solar systems with millions of planets. Then there are the things we don't see with the naked eye, nebulas, quasars, black holes. There are a whole lot of things out there that I can't begin to understand. And then there's the little spot in the middle of it all called planet earth. It's a beautiful little blue and green planet; and it's our home.

But it doesn't belong to us. Oh no! The psalmist tells us, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell in it." Our home, our planet, belongs to God. All that is in it belongs to God. We belong to God. And so I pray, "Lord, open our eyes that we may see the wonders of your creation. Open our eyes that we may truly appreciate the magnificence. And inferred in what follows is, "Open your hearts that we may care for your creation as we should care for the precious gift that you have lent to us."

The loan starts with ourselves, our bodies. Sixteen of us at this church are finishing a six week introduction to The Daniel Plan. The Daniel Plan is all about being healthier: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. The Daniel Plan emphasizes that our bodies are a gift from God and a temple of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, that's at least in part what it means to be created in the image of God. There is a spark of the divine in each of us; and we are called to care for the gift.

But why? Why care for our bodies? Two reasons: First, simply because they are a gift from God, and if someone gives you a very special gift, it is only

right to care for it in the best way possible. But secondly, because we can only care for the rest of creation when our bodies are in the best possible shape. I've heard multiple stories of people who had no incentive to care for their bodies, until they realized they could no longer lift their grandchildren. Worse yet, I've heard many stories of people who truly abused their bodies until they realized that their health concerns were so severe that they might never live to see their grandchildren. Friends, that is not the will of God.

But it's not just about people. It's about all of creation. Ginny and I try to have as little environmental impact as possible. We generally only put trash out about every three weeks, and even then our can is generally not full. We buy most of our produce fresh; we carry our own bags to the market; and we compost the scraps. What refuse we can't compost, we try to recycle. We both drive hybrid cars, and we use only organic lawn care products. I could list more good things we do for the environment, but we certainly have our sins as well. I have friends who keep their houses much cooler than we do in the winter. While we try to turn out lights that we don't need, we still burn more electricity. We probably waste more water than we should, leaving water running when washing dishes or spending too long in the shower. And then there's our love of travel – travel for pleasure that burns fuel and contributes to pollution and global warming. Still, I pray that, when I leave this earth it's not worse off for my having been here. The earth is the Lord's. I'm only a steward charged with caring for a very small piece of God's creation.

The creation story of Genesis says that God has given humanity dominion over all the earth. God has given the earth to us to rule. Friends, dominion does not mean abuse. God does not abuse God's creation. If he lends creation to us, we should not abuse it either. Hildegard von Bingen was an eleventh century German mystic. She said, "All of creation God gives to human-kind to use. If this privilege is misused, God's justice permits creation to punish humanity." That was in the eleventh century. Hildegard had never heard of global warming; but we have, and the ramifications are truly catastrophic. I heard a climate scientist a few weeks ago who stated, "I have no doubts that the earth will eventually recover; humanity just might not be around to see it."

Our scripture from Genesis is fairly common. Less common is this quote from Exodus:

For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard. (Exodus 23:10-11)

Anybody know a farmer today that lets their land lie fallow every seven years? Instead we truly abuse our soil; and when it becomes unfertile, we pour artificial chemicals into it to try and boost it; and that works until we manage to kill all the precious microbes in the soil which is what has happened in India. Still, I submit we can read this scripture in a broader context. We're not all farmers, but this scripture calls us to give our environment some rest, and not to try to squeeze everything we can out of it in the short term to its detriment in the long term.

It's no secret that I am not a major supporter of our current leadership in Washington. That's not purely a political situation. There are Republicans who I support on both the federal and state level. But the current leadership in both the Whitehouse and Congress seems to be very short sighted, especially when it comes to the environment; and, when it comes to the environment, any damage that is done is not easily undone.

So we gather here, in the beauty of the earth, and I'm not one to preach a "doom and gloom" sermon. I have said that I always try to do three things in a Sermon: 1) Educate, that is present at least some small bit of new information; 2) Challenge, challenge the congregation and challenge myself to respond; and, 3) Send folk out filled with the love and the joy and the peace of Christ.

I think I've done some educating. If nothing else we learned that the Bible actually tells us to let our land lie fallow every seven years. Now the challenge: I challenge each of us, myself included, to first examine our own lives. In what ways can we personally be better stewards of the environment? I also challenge each of us to consider the actions of our representatives and contact them. If you agree with them, tell them. Just because I don't agree with most of their actions related to the environment, doesn't mean you should not. If, after becoming fully aware of a particular environmental situation, you think our government is making the right decision, you should tell them. However, if you think our representatives are making the wrong decisions, you also need to tell them.

I am encouraging our Justice and Witness Committee to keep a closer eye on the environment, and provide information to our congregation about what is happening and means of congregational response.

Finally, I encourage you to look around. Open your eyes to see the wonder of God's creation. Bask in the glory of God's creation. Revel in the wonder of God's creation. God has gifted us with the privilege of living in this beauty. May we care for it. May we nourish it. May we enjoy it, as we seek to live in harmony with all creation in love and joy and peace.

Let us pray...

Lord,
Let us open our eyes to your wonder.
Let us appreciate your glorious creation;
and help us live in harmony with your creation,
as we seek always to be in service to you.
Amen.

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