

## Stewards of God's Good Earth and Ours

### **Earth Day**

The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Earth Day was celebrated on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. I don't know how you observed this day – if you went to some Earth Day event – or if you involved yourself in some Earth Day project – or possibly if you just noted it as some passing new story – or possibly if you were just blissfully unaware that it had taken place.

Me? I spent a part of that day camping and kayaking on the Mississippi River – communing with the beauty of God's good creation – and at the same time – being very aware of how 'we' human beings – impact creation.

The questions I bring to us this morning are: 1) Is Earth Day – what it represents – being aware of our impact on all of creation – and taking steps to minimize that impact – is it simply a good and moral – ethical way of life and living – or does it have a theological basis?

2) How do we understand God's relationship to all creation and therefore how do we understand our relationship to this creation?

I think we answer question 2 – in order to answer question 1 – so let us start there.

## **Relationships**

We talk a lot around here about relationships. We understand that relationships are important. Why? Well, for one reason our God is relational. Remember that mystery of the Trinity – one God – yet at the same time three distinct persons – Father, Son, and Spirit – Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. How can this be – because the three – in mystery – dwell together as one in a relationship of love.

We understand that relationships are important because our God is relational. We often talk and make a great deal of the faith of our founding fathers – and mothers for that matter. The reality is that many of them were Deist – that is that they understood God as distant – a Creator who wound the springs of creation and then let them go to do their thing. Instead we know a God who is not distant but is present and active – a God who calls us to be ‘his people’, ‘adopted into his family’, and ‘his children’.

We understand that relationships are important because our God is relational. God gives us the gift of community – the church – in Jesus Christ – so that we might be nurtured, encouraged, find support, and joy – in the company of one another. God gives us the gift of marriage – of family – in all their different forms – because our God is relational.

And when we think of relationships often – we think of our relationship with our God and with one another. But what about God’s relationship to the Earth – to all of creation – not just us?

## **God’s Relationship to the Earth**

The book of Genesis begins with the telling of the creation stories. In these stories we see that God is the creator of all things; the heavens and the earth, the day and the night, the sky – clouds – rain – water – the environment in which we live. God created land – plants, – trees – fruit trees, nut trees, trees for climbing and trees for building - plants and trees of every kind. God created fish – all kinds of fish – one fish and two fish – red fish and blue fish (with apologies to Dr. Seuss can you tell I just spent time with my grandchildren?).

God created the animals – domesticated and wild – the creepy crawling ones that make our skin crawl – and the ones that take our breath away. God made us too – you, me – the woman sleeping right now in Indonesia – the man eating his dinner in Tanzania.

So in part God's relationship with creation is – creator and creature – maker and that which has been made. This is a power based relationship – the creator has power – authority over what has been created.

How does that go – the mom turns to her teenage son and says, '*Just remember, I brought you into this world and I can take you out.*' ☺

But what we see, though, is not a typical power structure. Usually the one who holds power – seeks to hold that power closely. A drug manufacturer patents a new drug so that they can control the distribution and pricing of a new drug. A song writer copyrights her songs so that she can get royalties when those songs are used. You get the picture.

But instead – God sends what he has created and tells them to ‘be fruitful and multiply’. From the beginning God shares his creative work with all of creation – he lets go of the power – the control – but at the same time God continues to be at work in creation.

For those who have tried but not been able to have children – you understand this. You go to fertility clinic – and they know all the biology of how things should work. They take the egg – they take the sperm – and sometimes – it works and there is life – and sometimes it doesn’t work. And in the end – when they try to explain it – why it works sometimes and why it doesn’t – they come back to the – we just don’t know. There is something about life – all of life that remains a mystery and a miracle.

God’s creative work didn’t end on the 6<sup>th</sup> day – but it continues even today – all around us and even in us. God is active in the work of creation – and creation allows us to know, in part, the handiwork – the beauty – the wonder – the mystery – of God.

### **Our Relationship to the Earth**

Now what about us? What about our relationship to creation? In our reading from this morning we see God creating humankind and then God calling them to ‘*fill the earth and subdue it and to have ‘dominion’ over it.*’ Interesting language don’t you think?

This is the language of conquest – isn’t it? Is this to be our relationship with creation – with every living thing – the animal – the fish – the bird – the tree – the plant? Are we to be like the feudal lords of the middle-ages – claiming all that we can control as ours and using it as we

please. Is this master/servant language? Creation – all that is not us – is there to serve our wants and our needs.

Do you remember the book written in the mid 60s by Shel Silverstein called ‘The Giving Tree’? This book is the story of a boy’s relationship with a tree – a relationship that changes as the boy grows into a man. At each and every stage of life the boy and then man – has new demands of the tree. A place to swing and climb, apples to sell so there might be money, branches in order to build a house, a trunk in order to build a boat – until all that is left is a stump.

Now there are many wonderful things about this story – it is a story of unselfishness – unconditional love – a metaphor of parenting – but it also shows a relationship with creation that assumes that all of creation is there for our use – whenever – however we choose.

Why I don’t think we can interpret the words of Genesis to fill, subdue and dominate all living things in a conquest – power over kind of way – is because that is not how God chooses to be in relationship with creation. Instead God chooses to excises dominion – in a collaborative – we are all in this together kind of way.

In fact when we think of God excising power – often we see – the opening of God’s hand (sharing and caring) instead of a closed fist. Isn’t this what Jesus was all about – God’s power coming to us in weakness – not coming to be served – but to serve others.

So what we see in God's relationship with creation and with power becomes the model for how we should be in relationship with creation. We are called to be good stewards – those who watch over – those who nurture – tend to – and care for – all of God's creation.

## **Ending**

I am proud to be a part of community of faith that is taking seriously its responsibility to be a good steward of the earth. I am proud to be a part of a community of faith that took seriously the design of this facility and these grounds. Providing green spaces for water run-off to be captured and absorbed. Planting trees – native grasses – and prairie flowers – initiating garden plots.

I am proud to be a part of a community of faith that would spend the money to put a geo-thermal heating and cooling system in this new facility. I am proud to be a part of a community of faith that is trying to eliminate waste – by using glasses, plates and mugs – instead of Styrofoam, paper and plastic. I am proud to a part of a community of faith that is thinking about how the coffee we drink is grown and harvested – sustainably – and how the workers are compensated – fairly.

I am proud that we are all looking for ways to use less paper. I am proud to be a part of a community where on the very first day when we worshiped in this space – one of our youth asked the question – where are our recycling bins.

Oh, I know – there are many things yet we can be doing – but as we think about Earth Day – and about our relationship with the Earth – we have some things to celebrate.