

When I was in college, I rented a room from a 90 year old woman. What I learned only after moving in was that she would time our showers during the first three weeks of our arrival. She would take an average of the amount of time we used to take a shower, and proceed to let us know that over the following three weeks, she expected the time to be shortened to a 3-minute shower. Three minute shower?!?!?! Have you seen my hair???? In that moment, although bothersome, it awakened to awareness of my own impact upon the earth. April 22nd marked the 40th anniversary of Earth Day. Did you do anything special to mark the day? Reluctantly, I have to admit, I didn't. In fact, that day, I believe I drove 50 miles in my car (albeit an earth-friendly Prius of course), and I think I had a hamburger at Wendy's. Therefore I am culpable of adding to my carbon footprint and destroying the rain forest. The one thing I did do, was participate in the Earth Day sales, adding to consumption, although it was to purchase energy-efficient light bulbs. I actually had someone tell me that they don't believe in this earth day stuff, but in the same breath said they've been composting and recycling for years, and that brings me to the challenge of preaching about environmental issues in church. Some will assume that this Global Warming or whole green movement is the conspiracy of Democrats and Liberals who are quoting bad science. So it's chalked up to be just another political tactic. Another challenge of preaching about the environment is that some might think that going green is a perfectly legitimate thing, but what has it to do with faith? Talking about the environment should be the task of scientists and politicians not pastors and Christians.

So here's a quote from someone most of you are familiar with: *I find myself becoming more and more an advocate of the true ecologists where their recommendations are realistic. Many of these people have done us an essential service in helping us preserve and protect our green zones and our cities, our water and our air. The growing possibility of our destroying ourselves and the world with our own neglect and excess is tragic and very real.* Billy Graham: Even Billy Graham was concerned for Creation... you can't accuse him of being liberal!

Is Creation Care a political game? Is all of this concern with going green rooted in the work of Politicians like Al Gore and Hollywood movie stars like Leonardo DiCaprio, and therefore completely suspect? So why talk about Earth Day or caring for the environment in church? Flip through the psalms and see how many of them refer to creation. Look in your hymnal at one of our most triumphant hymns - All Creatures of our God and King, which is based on canticle of the sun by Francis of Assisi. It was composed in 1224. My point is that eco-theology is not some new fad. It is not inspired by modern politicians or movie-stars. Creation Care has been a part of the Christian Tradition and a part of our practice as disciples for hundreds and hundreds of years.

The UMC designates one Sunday a year as a Festival of God's Creation. If you are in worship because you have a deep faith in God, you are an environmentalist. Call it Creation Care, call it stewardship, call it concern for the legacy we leave for future generations. Environmental issues are spiritual issues. All life is dependent upon the Creator in whom we live and move and have our being. It is also dependent upon creation. You cannot have healthy people on a sick earth. Our behaviors & choices matter. The clothes we wear, the food we eat, the coffee we drink, the electricity we use, and the cars we drive. These behaviors all affect the environment.

Humanity has never had the kind of power to effect weather like we do today. Weather has power over us, we think – with floods and drought, hurricanes and tornadoes, earthquakes & tsunamis. This is a new thing. *"For the first time, our power to destroy outstrips the earth's power to restore."*

Global climate change makes us think of ourselves and our environment in a totally new way. The invitation to care for creation comes not from the mouths of politicians and movies stars, but from the Bible itself. And that we are inspired to greater levels of care for creation comes not so much from fear, although, as Billy Graham himself said, we should fear the consequences of our cruelty to creation, but through a deepening connection to the love of God. Through loving creation, caring for it, learning to live in ways that are gentle with the environment, that are careful and not damaging, we are loving what God loves.

Environmental issues belong in church. Our faith calls us to protect and love Creation. Scripture makes significant claims about God's creation in a 5-act play.

Act I: The Earth is the Lord's! (Psalm 24: 1) God created it: The first two chapters of Genesis identify God as the creator of all that exists, and show how God cherishes and delights in every part of creation, and creation delights in praising the creator. "Let *everything that breathes praise God!*" (Psalm 150). Creation is the handiwork of a loving God who saw all that was made and pronounced it " good." We are only part of the vast order of creation belonging to God.

Act II: God calls human beings to the task of stewardship. Stewardship is often used in reference to time, talents, and financial resources. Stewardship also has strong implications for the relationship between humans and the earth. God has given us responsibility to care for creation. Genesis 1 uses the word Dominion. In Hebrew culture, kings had dominion; they were understood as exercising dominion. However, that can be expressed in different ways. A good king in Hebrew culture was understood as one who exercised dominion with mercy, justice, and compassion. Gen. 2:15 says God took Adam in the garden of Eden to till it and to keep it. The word till in Hebrew is "*abad*", which literally translated means "to serve." The same word is found in Joshua, "*As for me and my house we will serve (abad) the Lord.*" The Hebrew verb to keep, "*shamar*," means loving, caring, sustaining. The connotation of the word is to keep physiologically (for example, keeping a cucumber in the garden, in relationship to soil, air, water (with all that keeps it alive and healthy) -- rather than keeping a cucumber in a pickle jar on the shelf. *Shamar* is the same word in the blessing: "*May the Lord bless and keep you*" (Nm 6:24). As God keeps and sustains us, so must we keep & sustain creation. We are to nurture, sustain and care for creation the way God nurtures, sustains and cares for us. Stewardship is a mandate for "earthkeeping," which implies a caring relationship between humans and creation like that of a shepherd and sheep. We need to re-establish our personal relationship to the Earth. We have been given the sacred gift of this Earth and this life. But if we don't feel this intimate relationship, then we will never be able to be true stewards of this world. If we don't feel the joy and spiritual sustenance of walking on the Earth, of breathing fresh air, of hearing birds, and feeling the soil in our hands, then we will never feel moved to foster the gifts of nature for those who follow us.

Act III: The land mourns for the way we have hurt creation; Our relationship with God, each other and with creation are all part of the same fabric. Pull any thread and the whole piece begins to unravel. Human ignorance/selfishness have ecological consequences. The Bible makes connections between human sinfulness and destruction of creation. Isaiah 24: 5 "*The Earth lies polluted; for they have transgressed laws, broken the covenant*". Hosea 4 "*There is no faithfulness, and no knowledge of God in the land. . . . Therefore the land mourns . . . even the fish of the sea are perishing*"

Act IV: God enters creation to redeem it God heals what human beings have broken; God became incarnate in Jesus Christ, became part of creation to heal and restore the broken

relationships. God reconciles all things, whether on Earth or in heaven (Col 1: 20). *Ro 8:18-23 19 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.* Through the goodness of creation, God heals and restores. Creation itself will be liberated from its bondage! Creation Care is not some new fad, nor is it a liberal democratic conspiracy. Creation Care is an ancient part of our Christian Tradition even if it was largely ignored for our lifetimes.

Act V: Witnessing to the resurrection Christians are called to witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In our words and actions we are called to reflect the love of Christ. We cannot by our own efforts, "save the earth." Only God, who is the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer of all creation, can do that. But as Christians, we are expected to join God in that good work. We can begin to model that kind of love and care for the earth that God has for us and for all creation. The church is called to participate in God's transformation of creation. Winston Churchill said, "*We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give*"

Think about times you have sensed God in creation – in the beauty and majesty of the mountains or the stars at night, the power of rivers, or the stillness of the desert. In these moments, do you not find refreshment and restoration? The creation itself with all of its complexity and mystery bears witness to God. The founder of the Sierra Club, John Muir said, "*Everyone needs beauty as well as bread, places to pray in and play in, where nature may heal body and soul alike.*" Openly celebrate God's creation in all of its manifestations. The forests, the clear water that flows from the mountains, the bald eagles, flowers that paint our neighborhood.

Continuously connecting to the "goodness" of all that God has created is one way to awaken our hearts to the climate crisis. If we can learn to love the natural world, we will protect it and if we love one another we will want future generations to share the bounty that we have had during our time here. I'm convinced that the church has a critical role to play in bringing people to a new understanding of our place and purpose in creation. The church is one of the key institutions in helping people to believe that humans are part of nature, not outside it or over it. The church is the voice that can speak of intrinsic worth instead of our society's fixation on economic value. The church has a stake in addressing the long-term, instead of the next election.

Rather than dwell on potential consequences, we can emphasize that the story is not finished. People of faith are embracing their call to environmental stewardship in unique and inspiring ways. Thousands of people are choosing to conserve energy and advocating for renewable energy sources. People of faith gather to offer prayers of thanksgiving and petition for God's creation. With this growing momentum, people of faith can turn the tide on global warming/other threats to God's creation. Let us become environmentalists. We are called to be caretakers of God's Creation.

Let me end with this simple story of an old man who was so wise he could answer questions that were almost impossible for people to answer. So two young people decided to go him one day. They said to one another, "We're going to trick this old man today. We're going to catch a bird, and we're going to carry it to this man. And we're going to ask him, 'This that we hold in our hands today, is it alive or is it dead?' If he says, 'Dead,' we're going to turn it loose and let it fly. But if he says 'Alive,' we're going to crush it." So they walked up to this old man, and they said, "This that we hold in our hands today, is it

alive or is it dead?" He looked at the young people and he smiled. And he said, "It's in your hands."
The future of the Earth and of our children is now in our hands.
May we handle it with exceedingly loving care.