

Caring for Creation

Genesis 1:26-31; Colossians 1:15-20, John 20: 19-31

April 23, 2006

The editor of a Christian magazine was enjoying a fried fish dinner in a rustic Tennessee restaurant. She was having a quiet conversation with her friend. However, she couldn't help overhearing a discussion at another table. Apparently two families who attended the same church were having supper together. They were talking about something their minister had said about ecology. They agreed wholeheartedly that such concerns are no business

of the church. In fact, they said, God is in charge of everything, and human beings (actually they said men) have the right to use the earth and everything in it as they see fit. MAN has been given dominion over the earth, and God won't let anything really bad happen to the earth that God doesn't want to happen.

What's wrong with this picture? This morning I'm going to give you three reasons that I believe this is the wrong attitude for Christians to have.

The first reason is Jesus' life and his resurrection. The theologian Sally MacFague says that the very fact that Jesus became a part of creation shows its value. And look at the scene we read about in our Gospel lesson today. "Peace be unto you," Jesus said, when he appeared to the disciples after his resurrection. "Peace." Then he went on to say, "As the Father has sent me, so send I you." It didn't take the disciples long to figure out that being sent meant to spread the good news that Jesus came to save all people.

It took a bit longer to see the wider implications of our mission. This mission gets articulated clearly in the letter to the Colossians. "In

Christ all things in heaven and on earth were created,” the writer says, and “Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, making peace through the blood of his cross.” Reconcile all things? Making peace with all things? If we look around we see that hasn’t been accomplished yet. Not only is there conflict among nations, there is rampant destruction of the earth and misuse of resources. Just one example of this is the way creeping urbanization is wiping out much of nature.

Ogden Nash lamented:

I think that I shall never see

A billboard lovely as a tree:

Indeed, unless the billboards fall,

I’ll never see a tree at all!

If God sent Christ to reconcile all things and Christ’s work isn’t completed yet, then his words, “As the Father sent me so send I you,” take on a wider meaning.

Maybe you think I’m stretching things. Maybe you want to say our job as Christians stops with telling the good news and caring for our neighbor. Than I will give my second reason. Our neighbors include our children and their children, and the children and grandchildren of other people. We should take care of the earth in order to pass it on.

The third reason takes us back to the very passage the two families were discussing in the Tennessee restaurant--God’s charge to humans in the first chapter of Genesis. “God blessed them and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over ...every living thing that moves upon the earth.’”

The word dominion can be misleading. It can also mean we are responsible for the well being of whatever we have dominion over. We are to care for and nurture the earth.

Did you ever notice that the first words God spoke to humans were not about our relation to God, but to the earth? In these words God shares with us the power over and responsibility for the earth

One preacher put it this way:

Our creator, the sovereign God who places us in his

Creation tells us we are to be caretakers of that creation.

He has given to us everything, and we are to be its

managers. We must remember that the earth still belongs

to God, and we are merely set in it to watch and care for

it temporarily.

You know how it is when you borrow something from a friend. You are careful

to take care so that it can be returned in as good a shape as when you borrowed it. That's the way

it ought to be with the earth and its resources - not ours to do with as we please, but loaned to us for a while from God. It is to be turned over to him again with an account of how we cared for it.

What God says to us, then, is this: "I have given you a world to live in, take care of, and preserve for future generations; use all the skill you

have to love it and manage it well."

Unfortunately we have seen this admonition of Scripture to "bring it under control" as justification to rape and exploit the land of its resources rather than to guard, preserve, and love it. We have seen the creation as the enemy to be tamed rather than the precious resource it is.

Just to show you how poorly we're doing, and how little we know about our performance, I'm going to give you a quiz. Just call out your answers to the following questions: (This quiz is a few years old. The present answers would probably be more disturbing)

1. Years ago 10 million gallons of crude oil were spilled in the Exxon Valdez catastrophe. That amount of oil would keep all the cars in the United States going for how long? (one day)

2. How many species of plants and animals become extinct daily? (100)

3. How many babies die daily from hunger and disease? (40,000)

4. How long does it take for 50 acres of rain forest to disappear?

(one minute)

5. The U.S. is about 6% of the world's population. What per center o the world's resources do we use? (25%)

Some of us were privileged during our adult study class to hear Larry Harvill talk about Energy and the Environment. He'll make his final

presentation on the subject on May 7. Just one of the disturbing examples he shared with us was this. Imagine a time line that represents the millions of years it took for all the coal, oil and natural gas deposits to be created. Such a time line would start in Anchorage, Alaska and reach to the back wall of our sanctuary. If we extend the line to show how long it will be from the time we started using those resources until they're all used up, (about 200 years), it would stop about where the front chairs are here in our sanctuary. Hardly what we'd call good stewardship!

Not only that, our use of these fuels have polluted the atmosphere and created global warming. And now that oil is running out, our government, instead of developing clean solar and wind energy, is planning instead to build more coal refineries. Our government is planning to pollute the earth even more! Again, hardly what we'd call good stewardship! One of the many things we can do to protect the environment is to sign a petition opposing the building of these coal refineries. You'll find the petition in your bulletin. If you're willing, please sign it and leave it on the back table. I will mail the petitions.

I once saw a play that illustrated beautifully the situation we find ourselves in. It seems representatives from our planet went to an extra-terrestrial realtor to ask for another planet to rent. Our representatives explained that our planet was getting shabby and overcrowded and we'd decided it was time to move.

"Fine," the realtors said, "Do you have any particular requirements?" "No..." was the reply, "except we need more space." "Here's a nice big planet for you, and it's vacant at the moment."

"But won't pull of gravity on such a large planet make it difficult for us to move?"

"Oh, you want to move around? Well, that would be impossible on this planet. As a matter of fact you'd be flat as a pancake. But you said you didn't have any requirements. Let's see, how about this one...it's considerably smaller—Plenty of bare rock, very dry, and a nice atmosphere of pure nitrogen."

"No plants? No animals? No water to drink? What would we eat? And we can't breathe nitrogen!"

“You SAID you had no requirements! All right. Here’s one that should suit you. Lots of water and green plants and an atmosphere that has plenty of oxygen. The present renters are trashing the place, so the Landlord is seriously considering evicting them. It’s called...Earth. Would you like me to make inquiries?”

“NNNo. That’s all right. We’ll stay where we are. Just forget we were here.”

What God says to us, then, is this: "I have given you a world to live in, take care of, and preserve for future generations; use all the skill you have to love it and manage it well.