Week 2: Care Of Creation: Our Response As Christians
Genesis 1:1-25
Preached by Bill Blair
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Last week, I spoke about how we need to view the wonders of nature, both large and small, with new eyes, letting them be the trigger that sparks our awareness of creation and thus brings us closer to God. I called this the "creation connection."

I also mentioned how an appreciation of God's creation evokes a response from us, initially simply awe, gratitude, and praise that the God of creation cares about us, redeems us through Christ Jesus, and sustains us via the Holy Spirit. But I ended last week with the idea that our response to God's goodness in creation needs to go beyond praise to God. We need to take seriously our part in the care of creation. Today I'd like to explore these two issues a little further with you.

Creation connection: Last week, I said that becoming more aware of creation has an enriching effect on one's Christian life and experience, opening new perspectives into our thinking and ways of living. Here is one example of something that came to my mind through the creation connection: It is not just us who desire to connect to God, but God desires to connect with us. How is this supposed to happen?

In Exodus 20, verse 8, it says, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." This is none other than the fourth of the Ten Commandments, right in there with all of the "Thou shalt nots…" Harry has described in recent sermons how the Pharisees and Sadducees had made so many rules related to the Sabbath that it had become a burden on the people. Sometimes I think this is the aspect of the Sabbath that sticks with us as well, and we reject it as a dated concept from a time long ago. Yet what was the real purpose behind the Sabbath? It was to be time set aside to connect with God, to be intentional about seeking to hear God's voice and discern God's direction for us. And to allow God to connect with us. This is not an outdated tradition.

When I think about the Ten Commandments, I usually feel pretty good. I don't lie or steal or murder or bear false witness. But I read this one about the Sabbath, and I am convicted. We are all convicted. Our post-modern society, driven almost exclusively by concerns about "productivity" and "consumerism", has lost the concept of Sabbath almost entirely. And with that loss, we have lost much of our connectedness to God. We need to reclaim the concept of Sabbath, of taking time to connect with God and allowing God to connect with us, as an important element of our faith journeys.

How can we reclaim the concept of Sabbath in a meaningful way? Let's face it, it is not practical to drop everything and "do nothing" (but come to church!) all day Sunday, especially when the Ravens are playing! But *we can reclaim the concept behind the Sabbath*, the idea of being intentional about seeking God's will and connecting with God. And maybe those moments of appreciation of God's creation, where we stop long enough

to realize the awesomeness of God's creation, open the door to *awareness*, effectively providing us with "mini-sabbath" experiences on which we can build. This is one manifestation of the creation connection.

Care of Creation: Our response to the idea of caring for creation is largely dictated by what we perceive our "role" to be. In this regard, I think it is very easy to get a skewed perception based on some of our more popular scriptures and translations. Genesis 1:28 uses the words "subdue" and announces we are given "dominion over" creation. Even my favorite Psalm 8 talks about God having given people "dominion" over creation. These words, and our concept of their meaning, are sometimes used justification for our misuse of creation's gifts.

But if we dig a bit deeper, (with some help from Pastor Janet here!), we find a broader meaning of these terms. In Hebrew, "subdue" means to rule over, but it is a shared task with the ruler of it all (God). And "dominion" does not mean "domination," but rather it has a stewardship or a care-taking aspect. By God's having given "dominion" to people, God is giving us a responsibility, not a right. The earth is ours to use, but also ours to care for. This is certainly a valid approach to our role in creation care, and one that is most often invoked.

There are many other scriptures that address our relationship with creation and our role with respect to it in slightly different ways that provide insights. Indeed, as we read passages specifically with the idea of trying to understand our role in creation, the scriptures open up in their meaning in new ways.

I like the perspective of today's Old Testament lesson, Leviticus 25, 23-24, for instance:

> "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens or tenants. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land."

This professes the idea that we are "tenants" of the land, that *the earth belongs to God* and we are given rights of proper usage. And in verse 24, it says: "you shall provide for the redemption of the land." Redemption, the saving of something from sin or evil. Wow. If that's not a call to care for creation, I don't know what is!

Deuteronomy chapter 8 (whole chapter) talks about God providing all we need through His creation, and that as we prosper, we should not forget from where (*from Whom*!) these gifts have come. (Read Deut. 8, 7-10)

> "For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and figs and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing…You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good earth that He has given you."

In a reading between the lines, it is a small step to infer from this passage the concept of "sufficiency," of "enoughness." God gives us all we need, not all we want. Our society imposes on us what is effectively a demonic consumer mentality, making us unsatisfied with what we have, and leaving us wanting for more. Marketing techniques are used to move the goalpost of contentment, blurring the line between "want" and "need." This is at its root a very spiritual issue, because it strikes directly at the idea of sustainability.

The US per capita energy use is 30 times that of the developing world. This alone, even without getting into issues of global warming or climate change, raises tremendous social justice issues. Why is the US (only 5% of the world's population) allowed to use 30% or more of the world's energy? Why is our society allowed to expend the world's collective resources at such prodigious rates when millions of people are hungry and do not even have access to clean water? And what are the global consequences of these huge expenditures of resources? (Lord, forgive us, for we know not what we do!)

One does not have to be a Christian to be an environmentalist. Secularists can also be good stewards of creation, and many are. But as Christians, we need to be concerned about caring for creation, about sustainability issues for future generations, about social justice issues as they pertain to care of God's creation (including people!). *We cannot continue to sleepwalk through our lives not seeing what we are doing.* We need to engage ourselves in helping to find solutions. Where do we start?

We start with *awareness*. We start at the individual level with recognizing the wonders of creation around us, and with an individual response. Start small and let it grow on you. (That's what has been happening with me, especially over the last two years.) Become aware of wasteful things you do and start changing your behavior. Walk or bike when feasible instead of driving. Flip off an unneeded light or fix a dripping faucet. Yes, even change a light bulb! These and a hundred other small steps can be taken because they make us aware of what we are doing, and highlight the fact that we have to change.

Dare I say, can we start to act collectively (as a church)? Again, start simple and let it build. Can we stop using styrofoam and plastic cups that do not biodegrade? Can we recycle more and cut our energy usage? As we go through building improvements, can we keep energy efficiency and smart building practices in mind? (After all, it is in our best interest economically as well!) Then can we look outward, and in our outreach, as an individual congregation and as part of the Presbyterian tradition, work for social justice in our neighborhood and the world at large. Can we view this as part of our mission, and not just some esoteric thing that we are supposed to do because we are a church? Can we develop a sense of urgency about this mission, and put effort and resources into it? Only time will tell.

I secretly hope that this concept of "care for creation" within the church as a whole can develop into a tool for evangelism. As people outside the church community see movement from within the church to care for creation (in many different ways), it will open opportunities not only for dialog, but hopefully for sharing Jesus' love for creation,

including our love for each other as human beings, as part of that creation. God bless our efforts to reach out and care for this world we call home.

Prayer: Dearest God, you created this world and pronounced it good. As we become more aware of your creation and our place in it, help us to take seriously our role as stewards of your good earth. We are but tenants in this world, and yet we act like selfish, greedy children more often than care-takers. Forgive us for our thoughtlessness. Help us to live gently in your creation, and to have a sense of urgency about changing our ways. And help us to care for and love our neighbors throughout your creation.

In Jesus' name, Amen.