

SERMON – 04/26/09

GREEN FAITH: Climate

This past Wednesday was Earth Day... to celebrate, I spent the day out in creation... in the beauty of nature... looking at the trees... the mountains... and trying to find my golf balls!

- Yep, it was my first time THIS YEAR out on any golf course... and I had to play Koolau Golf Course, of all places!
 - In case you're not familiar with Hawaii golf courses... if you're only going to play one course... and you don't get out much to play, like I don't... then KOOLAUI is NOT the course to play... 'cuz it's brutal!
 - But we had a great time!
- I went with 2 of my clergy colleagues from California, Craig Brown & Brian Parcel...
 - And we were hosting Rev. Jim Griffith, who specializes in helping pastors start new ministries... he's here to lead a district conference this week.
 - We were blessed that it never rained on us... and we were able to play all 18 holes...
 - I have to confess, however, I was not a very good steward of the environment... as I "donated" 10 golf balls to the course...
 - (Hey, it's a really tough course!)
 - However, I did find 8 golf balls, so my lost-n-found factor was only **-2** (that's gotta be worth something, right!?!).
- But it was the 29th EARTH DAY... every April 22nd people around the globe (or at least around this country), go out of their way to make sure people are aware of how we're impacting our environment...
 - Last fall, one of the people here in the church asked if I might preach a sermon somewhere around Earth Day...
 - Even though I'd already planned my sermon series for 2009, I felt a nudge in my spirit that it was indeed something that God wanted me to do...
 - I have to admit... that although the ENVIRONMENT is an important issue to many people... it has not been that big of a deal to many churches.

- I think that's why this poster is being used by the UMC to launch a new denominational website for young adults called "10thousanddoors.org".
- It asks: "What if church considered ECOLOGY part of Theology?"
- So starting this week, and running for the next month, we're going to be journeying together in a new sermon series entitled: "GREEN FAITH."
 - It's a chance for us to look a bit more closely at the environment... but from a faith perspective.
 - Each week I hope to give you a biblical grounding... an update on the current state of affairs with each particular topic (Climate, Land, Water & Energy)... and some practical advice on how you can make a difference.
 - I've been preparing for weeks, and I can honestly say I'm very excited about this series... I hope God uses it to not only touch your heart, but excite you into making a difference, too!

The Bible speaks quite a bit about the environment... nature... and creation...

- One of our constituents loaned me her copy of THE GREEN BIBLE...
 - You know how some Bibles come in a "Red Letter" edition? Where all of the words of Jesus are printed in red letters?
 - Well, The Green Bible has all of the "environmental passages" printed in... guess what color... yep, green letters!
 - Not to mention a number of wonderful essays & articles are found in the front of the Bible dealing with faith & the environment.
- Of course, the ultimate "green passage" in all of scripture has to be The Creation Stories of Genesis chapters 1 and 2...
 - *"In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep... Then God said, 'Let there be light;' and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness... and there was evening and there was morning, the first day." (Genesis 1:1-5)*
 - Out of the dark chaos of nothing... God created...
 - God created the cosmos... EVERYTHING!

- *“And God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good”*
(Genesis 1:31).
- It was good! When God creates... God creates it good!
- Now I’m personally not too concerned about WHEN it was that God created... or HOW it was that God created...
 - The creation stories of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 tell me more about the relationship between God & Creation... and God and us!
 - The great astronomer, Carl Sagan, said... that if we could squeeze the creation of the cosmos into a single year... then the big bang happened on January 1st.
 - The sun & the planets came into existence on September 10th...
 - And human beings arrived on the scene at 11:50pm on December 31st!
 - In the grand scheme of things, folks... we haven’t been here very long at all...
- But Genesis 2:15 tells us... that when humankind came on the scene... God gave us the responsibility of caring for the Creation we lived in.
 - *“The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.”*
 - When the people of God put together the stories of how we relate to this cosmos... they knew a component of that relationship involved our caring for this amazing environment!
 - All the while knowing that it was never “ours” to do with what we please... it’s still God’s!
 - Psalm 24:1 reminds us that *“The earth is the LORD’S and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it...”*
 - The problem is that we, over time, have forgotten that.
 - In 1967, a historian named Lynn White (no relation to me, by the way!)... wrote an article for *Science* magazine... in which he charged that the roots of the ecological crisis are essentially religious!
 - The problems derive from Christian tradition in particular, he said, which has taught people to view themselves as “superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim.”

- One of the articles in the front of *The Green Bible* is titled, ‘Reading the Bible Through a Green Lens,’ by Calvin B. DeWitt...
 - In it, DeWitt describes some of the “stumbling blocks to creation care” that Christians often have problems with...
 - (Tell me if you’ve heard any of these!)
 - **“The world is not my home; I’m just passing through...”**
 - A fixation on heaven has caused some Believers not to care about the world around us... and that’s a shame!
 - **“I don’t want to be an extremist or alarmist”...**
 - Some folks hear the ‘doom and gloom’ that often surrounds the environment today, and therefore keep their distance... that’s also a shame.
 - **“I believe God gave us the job to do what we want with creation”...**
 - Unfortunately, instead of caring for creation... this kind of mentality gets us into the ‘use and abuse’ creation... not what God intended.
 - Remember Genesis 2:15? “Till it and keep it” was Adam’s job.
 - **“People are more important than the environment!”**
 - This is a common one, isn’t it? Especially when the conversation gets into the areas of endangered species & ecological protection...
 - The problem with this mindset is that it forgets that all of God’s creation is important... and often moves to quickly devaluing the rest of the created order.
 - And finally, some Christians are hesitant to get on board with caring for the environment because, **“I disagree with what some environmentalists & scientists say will happen.”**
 - I hear ya... I know that politics rears its ugly head into all aspects of society... and some people “get their dander up” whenever certain other people make ANY comments about the environment...
 - But DeWitt reminds us that we shouldn’t let the opinions of some people we disagree with get in the way with our responsibility to care for this world!
 - He writes, “Doing what is right, and what God calls us to do should not carry a litmus test for who is allowed to do it.”

- The 20th Century writer, G.K. Chesterton, put things into perspective for Christians when he said this:
 - “The essence of all pantheism, evolutionism, and modern cosmic religion is really in this proposition: that Nature is our mother... The main point of Christianity was this: that Nature is not our mother: Nature is our sister. We can be proud of her beauty, since we have the same father, but she has no authority over us; we have to admire, but not to imitate. This gives to the typically Christian pleasure in this earth a strange touch of lightness that is almost frivolity... To St. Francis, nature is a sister, and even a younger sister: a little dancing sister, to be laughed at as well as loved.”
 - (St. Francis of Assisi, of course, was the author of our opening hymn, “All Creatures of Our God & King”!)

Many of us are familiar with Jesus’ parable of “The Good Samaritan,” aren’t we?

- It’s the story of a Jewish man who, while traveling on the dangerous road between Jerusalem & Jericho, was jumped by bandits... beaten up... robbed... stripped... and left to die!
 - As he was lying on the side of the road, two Jewish authorities passed by...
 - A lawyer and a priest...
 - But for whatever reasons, they did not choose to stop and help.
 - The 3rd passer-by, however, was a Samaritan... (Samaritans were seen as less-than-human by many Jews)...
 - And it was this despised foreigner who was the one to stop... bandage the wounds of the injured man... put him on his own donkey... take him to a nearby inn... and personally pay for the cost of his recovery!
 - It’s a familiar story, isn’t it?
- But what many people forget is the QUESTION that prompted Jesus to tell this story in the first place.
 - A lawyer had wanted to test Jesus, the Bible says, so he asked Jesus about inheriting eternal life.

- When Jesus asked him what the law said about it, the man correctly replied, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself”* (Luke 10:27).
- “Exactly,” said Jesus!
- “Yah, but who’s my neighbor?” the lawyer retorted.
- To which Jesus tells the parable...
- Now some of you are thinking to yourselves... “Okay, Pastor Jim... nice story... but what does it have to do with the environment?”
 - Good question! I was wondering the same thing when I read Dr. J. Matthew Sleeth’s article in [The Green Bible](#).
 - But Dr. Sleeth proposed that this story, when read through the lens of the environment, actually teaches us some important lessons...
 - Especially when we think of Chesterton’s quote about nature being our “sister”... and the fact that what we do to the environment DOES effect our neighbors all across the globe!
- Here are some of the connections to the environment that Dr. Sleeth sees in the parable of the Good Samaritan...
 - To have any lasting effect, our hearts must be moved by compassion...
 - We may find it dangerous...
 - We may have to use our own resources...
 - It may be inconvenient...
 - It may be expensive...
 - We may be ridiculed...
 - We will have to take ongoing responsibility...
 - Friends, everyone is our neighbor... including people across the globe & future generations!
 - That’s why caring for the environment needs to be an important priority to us.

With the little time we have left this morning, I’d like to focus the rest of our talk on the subject of our CLIMATE.

- In her book *The Green Earth Challenge: Integrating Faith & the Environment*, Winnie Williams says this...
 - “We have lacked compassion for much of our world, which stands at the brink of desolation due to overuse of land, the pillaging of resources, and the pollution of the atmosphere. This threat is the result of our ignorance & apathy; it is the result of individual & corporate greed, and it means we all must educate ourselves and commit to make action for our world.”
- There’s a phrase you’ll hear over and over here in the islands... and that’s “Lucky we live Hawaii!”
 - Anyone who’s ever traveled to big cities on the mainland (or overseas, for that matter)... knows that we are blessed with the quality of air above us here!
 - Yes, from time to time the volcano on the Big Island sends us some lovely “vog”... but for the most part, the trade winds keep our skies extremely clean & healthy.
 - Be that as it may, scientists tell us that our atmosphere is actually one of the more vulnerable parts of our environment.
 - Carl Sagan remarks that the relative size of our atmosphere to the rest of the earth... would be like taking a globe and putting a coat of varnish on it. That thin coat of varnish is about the size of our atmosphere... relatively speaking.
- J. F. Rischard, in his book *High Noon: 20 Global Problems, 20 Years to Solve Them*, has this to say about our climate...
 - “The world’s climate has never been static. Over the past 4.5 billion years, it has shifted constantly due to volcanic emissions, tectonic plate movements, changes in solar radiation, and several other factors. Yet, since the last ice age, the earth’s climate has been relatively stable, with global temperatures varying by less than 1 degree Celsius over a century in the last 10,000 years. But there is more and more evidence that human activities over the last 100 years have started to play a major role in producing rising temperature levels, with a worrisome acceleration over the last 20 years.”
- The classic definition of CLIMATE CHANGE... or “Global Warming” goes something like this...

- Global warming exists when a chemical reaction occurs as the sunlight impacts pollutants in the air... damaging the ozone layer that lies in the atmosphere 10-30 miles above the ground.
- Ozone is a form of oxygen that occurs naturally and provides a shield from the sun's ultraviolet radiation.
- Global warming, then, is the result of gases produced from burning gasoline, diesel fuel, natural gas, and coal: carbon dioxide (mainly) and methane, to name just a few...
- When released into the atmosphere, these gases block thermal radiation (ie. heat) from leaving the earth... hence the term, 'greenhouse gases.'
- Now, to what degree climate change or global warming is due to natural climatic conditions... verses man-made warming... has not been validated specifically.
 - However, the vast majority of climatic scientists tend to believe that humans play a major role in global warming...
 - In my study & research over the course of these past few weeks, however, it has come to my attention that not every scientist feels this way...
 - Some have said in order to get funding, scientists have to "toe the line" on the classic understanding of global warming... and the party line is to speak of "doom and gloom" about what MIGHT happen because of the state of the climate.
 - In 1998, some scientists from the American Association for the Advancement of Science noted that climate changes may be due more to changes in the sun... rather than the release of greenhouse gases...
- I recognize that global warming may be a political issue to some... nevertheless, whether its human pollution or natural occurrences... most agree that our atmosphere is in danger.
 - I know I run the risk of alienating some by showing this video clip...
 - But a few years ago, Al Gore made a film about our climate called "*An Inconvenient Truth*."
 - No matter what your political affiliations might be... I found this particular segment to be rather interesting... and I wanted to share it with you.
 - Let's listen to him talk about the practice of Arctic core sampling...
 - [Show TWO clips (back to back) from "An Inconvenient Truth"]

- I liked seeing the perspective of those 650,000 years... it does give a good sense of the cyclical rise & fall of the temperatures on earth...
- And the current levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere...
- Now, where will this lead? Well, that's what many of the scientists are debating...
 - I won't get into that this morning... but suffice it to say, we need to be doing whatever we possibly can to keep our atmosphere clean!
 - Andrew Revkin, environmental writer for the *New York Times*, & author of the book *The North Pole Was Here*, remarks that even if the entire world either: a) stopped driving vehicles completely & turned off every light... or b) started driving in circles all day long & turned ON every light... that science tells us the impact on the world wouldn't be discernible for 20 years!
 - (Think about that!)
 - It could be easy to slip into despair & wonder what difference it makes to care about the environment...
 - But Revkin states that this is a LEGACY issue...
 - It's not just our environment we're dealing with... but the environment & climate of our children & grandchildren!
 - And if we don't get started on doing a better job of caring for this earth, as God intended... it will never get done.

There's an interesting passage in the 8th chapter of Paul's letter to the church in Rome...

- It's a rather lengthy passage... so bear with me... but I think it's extremely important for us to keep in mind as we go through these next 4 weeks together...
 - Paul writes, *"I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility... in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope*

we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”
(Romans 8:18-25)

- Friends, this series is an opportunity for us to be reminded of the connection God has established between us and creation...
 - It’s a connection that can be wonderful...
 - But is also one that’s obviously damaged & not the way God intended...
 - My hope and prayer is that the Holy Spirit will encourage you in the weeks to come... encourage you to think bigger than you may already be thinking...
 - Not only to think bigger, but DREAM bigger – dream about how God wants us to live with our “sister” the earth...
 - And how we CAN make a difference, by the grace of God.
 - AMEN.