

SERMON – 05/03/09

“GREEN FAITH: Land”

Though I didn't go to elementary school here in Hawaii, I'd venture to say you sang one of the same songs that I did in Arizona.

- As a matter of fact, I'd go further to say that no matter where you went to elementary school... as long as it was after 1944, you probably sang it too!
 - It's a song written by Woody Guthrie... and is considered one of America's most famous folk songs...
 - In the 60's, it was recorded by Bob Dylan... The Kingston Trio... The New Christy Minstrels... Peter, Paul & Mary... and even The Seekers.
 - In the 70's, Bruce Springsteen recorded it...
 - Heck, even the Counting Crows released an acoustic version of it in 2005.
- By now I'm sure all you music buffs know exactly what song I'm talking about, right?
 - Yep... “This Land is Your Land”!
 - Everyone sing along...

*This land is your land, this land is my land
From California to the New York Island
From the Redwood Forest to the Gulf Stream waters
This land was made for you and me.*

- That's the underlying theme of today's sermon... as we have entered week two in our new series called “GREEN FAITH.”
 - Last week we launched the series by looking at an overview of why Christians should be concerned with the environment... and also examined CLIMATE.
 - Today, we're looking at the issue of LAND... which is quite a broad topic, and by no means will it be comprehensive of all of the possible topics surrounding this amazing earth...
 - Nevertheless, I'll move us from a biblical understanding to a cursory assessment of some of the issues today... and finish with some practical things we can do to make a difference!

In the first creation story (Genesis 1)... God creates the waters... sky... and land... and then adds a bunch of vegetation & critters... (all kinds of critters!)

- Then God brings humankind into the mix... and puts us in relationship with all of the critters & vegetation...
 - And “*God blessed them: ‘Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge! Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air, for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth.’*” (The Message)
 - And thus begun our relationship with this amazing land we call “Earth”!
- But all throughout Scripture, we can find passages that show how much God cares for the environment around us... (and how much God wants us to care, too!).
 - For example... In the 10 Commandments, commandment #4 calls us to “Remember the Sabbath & keep it holy.” Once a week we’re called to rest our bodies & restore our souls...
 - Well, did you know in the book of Leviticus 25:2ff... God instructs the people to give the land a Sabbath rest... every 7th year! God knew the land needed a break, if it was going to continue to sustain us.
 - God even built in environmental protections during times of war... Deuteronomy 20:19 says, “*If you besiege a town for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you must not destroy its trees by wielding an ax against them. Although you may take food from them, you must not cut them down.*”
 - I could share more and more passages like this... but I want to jump ahead to one of the lesser-known books in the Bible – Hosea... chapter 4...
 - The prophet Hosea tells the Israelite people that their unfaithfulness to God not only affects them... but all of creation around them.
 - “*Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing*” (Hosea 4:3).
 - It’s interesting, isn’t it... this was written over 2.5 thousand years ago... nevertheless, it could be speaking about parts of the world today, couldn’t it?

In his book *HIGH NOON: 20 Global Problems, 20 Years to Solve Them*, one of the main issues that author J.F. Rischard lifts up is **DEFORESTATION...**

- He notes how few of us realize how central a role forests play...
 - Along with woodlands & scattered trees... forests provide the planet's population with shelter, food, fuel-wood, medicines, building materials & paper...
 - They contribute to freshwater quality by slowing land erosion & filtering pollutants...
 - And about 2/3 of all terrestrial species are found in forest areas... a critical component to biodiversity (which we'll look at in a moment).
- A couple of years ago, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) put together an amazing television documentary series called "Planet Earth"...
 - I'd like to show you a clip from the first episode, "Pole to Pole"... it's about a portion of forest known as the Taiga... (and to be honest, I'd never heard of it until I saw the video)
 - Let's watch...
 - Today, roughly 30-35 million square kilometers of forests remain... about 25% of the world's total land surface... (probably down 20-50% from pre-agricultural times, though no one knows exactly).
 - There are a lot of factors that lead to deforestation... including over-consumption of products made from trees... uncontrolled industrialization... pollution from acid rain... cattle grazing... agriculture... wars... poverty... clear-cutting... and burning wood for fuel.
 - Richard Friedman, in his book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, notes that oftentimes, for the people who live in and around rainforests, selling their land & trees means food for their family.
 - "If we desire to save the land, then jobs for the poor must be addressed. Save a society and you will save a tree."
 - It's a complex issue, indeed.

SOIL is vital to the survival of us humans and animals... providing both food and habitat.

- It possesses nutrients & water that are essential for growing trees, plants, vegetables and grasses...
 - Dumping rubbish continues to be a serious problem.

- I remember a very powerful ad campaign growing up for “Keep America Beautiful”... the one with the Native American Indian sitting on his horse, overlooking a garbage dump... shedding a tear.
- Rubbish disposal is a challenging issue all over – even here in Hawaii – as we seek to find ways of dealing with our trash...
- Landfills & incinerators are usually the options used by most communities... though we in Hawaii have another option... H-Power!
- For the past 19 years, H-Power has been converting waste into energy...
- **Recycling** helps keep some of our rubbish out of landfills...
 - And I was really stoked to find our new blue recycling bins out in front of our house a couple of weeks ago! The new program begins this month (May) in Aiea!
 - When I lived in New Jersey during grad school, recycling was mandatory... and we had different bins for paper, glass & plastic (in fact, we could get fined if we put recycling items in our regular garbage bin!).
- Another option (that we heard about during the children’s time) in caring for our soil is **composting**...
 - Composting is the decomposition of plant remains and other once-living materials to make an earthy, dark, crumbly substance that is excellent for adding to houseplants or enriching garden soil...
 - It’s also a great way to recycle yard & kitchen wastes... and it reduces the amount of garbage sent to landfills.
 - There are a variety of options... from simple bins, to bins with worms!
 - Tyler & Kristen Imig’s worm bin here in Aiea turns food scraps & wet newspaper shreds... into amazingly rich soil!
 - (Plus, when you get bored, you can play with the worms! What a bonus!)

We can’t end our topic of the LAND without mentioning **Biodiversity & Species Habitat**...

- No one knows the total number of living species, but estimates range anywhere between 10-15 million... unfortunately, what is sure is that the rate of extinction has been increasing.
 - We are living, biologists like to remind us, during the “6th Extinction” – a loss of species as great as, and far more rapid than, the meteoric disaster that wiped out the dinosaurs.

- The main reason so many species are dying off or risking extinction is the loss of their habitats as a result of agriculture, deforestation, forest fragmentation by roads, and human population growth more generally...
- Biodiversity plays a big role in the very stability of the 5 major ecosystems on which life depends: the agricultural, coastal, forest, freshwater, & grassland ecosystems.
 - Diversity increases an ecosystem's resilience...
 - Having more species provides a greater cushion against environmental damage.
 - It's also fundamental to human health... from cholesterol to bacteria fighters... 10 of the world's 25 top-selling drugs are derived from natural resources.
 - As it turns out... 1 in 5 mammal species is currently threatened with extinction...
 - Not to mention the fact that 1 in 8 bird species is at risk.
 - In the US alone, there are 496 species of animals classified as threatened or endangered... while more than 1,000 animal species are endangered worldwide.
 - Estimates by the Eden Conservancy indicate that at least 2 species of God's creation go extinct every day! Two a day!!
 - Alex Steffen writes, "No one knows the real implications of this. It's true that sometimes ecosystems can survive, heal, even thrive with fewer or different species than they had when we went to work on them. It's also true that sometimes killing off just one or two key species can cause a spiral of collapse leaving a wasteland behind. Species are the rivets holding our ecosystems together, and we're knocking them out in handfuls, not knowing when the structure will collapse" (*World Changing*).

Now we come to the "How to Make a Difference" part of the sermon... a plethora of ideas on things we can do that will have an impact on our LAND...

- Many of the ideas I'll be sharing with you come from two wonderful little books with hundreds of these kinds of examples in them...
 - *The Green Book* by Elizabeth Rogers & Thomas M. Kostigen
 - *Wake Up and Smell the Planet* from Grist publications
- Let's start with something we've all heard before... REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE!

- **Reduce...** We live in a major “consumer society”... I read recently that the average family in the world has no less than 125 different items that belong to them. Here in the US, the average family has 10,000!
- We can practice reducing by not buying stuff we don’t really need.
- **Reuse...** When we do need something, first consider if we can get it used... or at least wring the last bit of usefulness out of everything you own!
- **Recycle...** If everyone in America simply separated the paper, plastic, glass & aluminum products from the trash & tossed them into a recycling bin, we could decrease the amount of waste sent to landfills by 75%
- (Currently, it takes an area the size of PA to dump all our waste each year!)
- One step along these lines would be to get a grip on your **junk mail...**
 - The average US household receives 1.5 trees’ worth of junk mail each year... and many of these trees are thrown directly into the trash.
 - Make a commitment to recycle your junk mail (you can take paper across the street to the Aiea Shopping Center bins!)
 - Or, better yet, register with a Mail Preference Service, like DMA Consumers (www.dmaconsumers.org)... And limit what kinds of mail actually come to you!
- Make it a point to **Use Fewer Paper Napkins** when you eat...
 - There’s no need to grab a huge stack when you know you’ll only use 1 or 2!
 - Each American consumes an average of 2200 standard 2-ply napkins per year (or 6/day!)
 - If everyone used an average of ONE FEWER napkins per day, more than a billion pounds of napkins could be saved from landfills each year!
- Double-side print your **copies** at work!
 - If just 1 in 4 office workers made all of their copies double-sided... then annual savings would equal 130 billion sheets of paper – a stack thicker than the diameter of the earth!
- If you’re a regular **coffee** drinker, consider bringing your own mug with you to work (or even church!)
- Americans use more than 14 billion paper cups every year... enough to circle the world 55 times!

- [Note: A few months ago, when I started preparing for this series... I decided to use a refillable mug every morning for my ice water at Starbucks! I'm now saving close to 200 plastic cups a year from going into the landfill!]
- And while we're on the subject of coffee... consider buying **Fair Trade** Coffee next time you're at the market...
 - The US consumes 1/5 of all the world's coffee...
 - However, many small coffee farmers receive prices for their coffee that are less than the costs of production... forcing them into a cycle of poverty & debt.
 - When we buy Fair Trade, we're assured that the coffee was purchased with fair conditions for the workers, farmers & communities in which they're grown.
- When you go to the **grocery store**... and they ask you "Paper or Plastic?" choose to bring your own reusable bags, instead!
 - The hardest part I've found about this is remembering to bring my reusable bags into the store when I go shopping...
 - But now I carry about 5 of them in the trunk of my car...
 - By the way, in 2007, San Francisco became the first US city to ban plastic bags... following the lead of South Africa, Bangladesh & Paris... just to name a few!
- We can make a difference by changing how we buy **paper towels**...
 - If possible, select paper towel rolls with smaller-size sheets in order to extend the life of each roll...
 - A decrease in US household consumption of just 3 rolls/year would save 120,000 tons of waste... and \$4.1 Million in landfill dumping fees!
- We can also stop using **disposable plastic razors**... here in the US, 2 billion plastic razors are purchased annually...
 - It might cost a bit more, but consider purchasing a metal razor and just buy the disposable blades...
- Recycle **e-waste** (electronic waste)...
 - This is one of those issues of convenience for me, at least...
 - Instead of simply throwing away old electronic items... cell phones, computer parts, stereo equipment... turn them in to a recycling location.

- Check out the National Recycling Coalition’s list of electronics-recycling programs by state...
- Or a company like ReCellular... that keeps 75,000 functional cell phones out of landfills each week (many of which it refurbishes & sells in developing countries).
- Next, consider **going paperless** for your banking needs...
 - From requesting automatic deposits for your paychecks...
 - To choosing not to request an ATM receipt when you withdraw money...
 - To signing up for paperless monthly bank statements (access your account online!)...
 - We could save an incredible amount of money & wasted paper!
- And finally, why not consider planting a tree?
 - Trees can help air pollution by lowering air temperature...
 - They help create oxygen...
 - They increase property values by shading concrete driveways & homes... (just to name a few!)
 - And today, we’d like to give you one to take home... for free!
 - With the help of our resident landscaper, Stuart Rinehart, the church has purchased 100 tree saplings and we’d like your family to consider taking one home to plant in your yard today!
 - You can pick one up on your way out... and if you have any questions, Stu will be outside to answer them!

Noted author, C.S. Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity* said this: “There are strange, exciting hints in the bible that when we are drawn in to Christ, a great many things in Nature will begin to come right.”

- Friends, as we move through life on this planet we call Earth, may we be a bit more intentional about the impact we’re having on Creation...
- And may we choose to be good stewards of this land that was “made for you and me!”
- AMEN.