

Christ Presbyterian Church

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"Glad You Asked - 'Creation Care: Is the Good Earth Just a Restaurant?'"

Gen 1:26-31; Romans 8:19-23; Cor 4:2

Several years ago I was asked to wrap up a teaching series on Stewardship. When the time rolled around for me to preach we had already looked at: Stewardship of life, Stewardship of time and Stewardship of money. My charge was to speak on Stewardship of Creation and . . . it did not go well. It's not that the talk was poorly crafted, it was just not well received. As I greeted folks after the service, what I essentially heard was: *"I did not come to church to hear a liberal, diatribe, based on some so-called statistics from a tree hugger. I came to church to hear a word from God."* Gulp.

So today as I stand before you I am asking, *why did I agree to take on the questions several of you asked about Christians and the Environment? . . .* (Perhaps this is the question I should address instead! ~ *Why did you do this, Daniel!?* ☺) In a nutshell, I agreed to talk about Creation Care because I believe that The Good Earth is more than a restaurant and I believe the Bible is clear ~ as followers of Christ, we have a calling to care for the Earth.

I thought about sharing dramatic statistics or graphic pictures of oil soaked birds in the Gulf, smog over LA, Flying Asian Carp in the Mississippi, Zebra Mussels in Lake Minnetonka, children in developing countries drinking filthy water, and melting polar caps. Instead of these scintillating stories, I have chosen to address the topic this way: I would like to set before you seven propositions or affirmations that arise from the Bible and then to suggest a few responses for our consideration. So, you may want to take out a pencil or a pillow. ☺ If time permits, when we get to the point of response, I may invite you to share what you are doing to care for God's creation.

Proposition 1: God is Creator & Jesus is at the center of Creation

The very first words of the Bible tell us that God is creator: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* Genesis 1:1.

Genesis 1 & 2 tell the story of creation in two different ways. My intention is not to debate how God created ~ either in 6 - 24 hour days (*there was evening and there was morning the 1st day*) or through a process of time (*with God, one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day*). My 1st proposition is simply an affirmation that God is the creator. *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*

When we come to the New Testament, we learn that Jesus was at the heart of creation: *Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were*

created: things in heaven and on earth; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [Colossians 1: 15–17]

The author and perfecter of our faith [Hebrews 12:2] is at the heart of the creation story. God is creator and Jesus is at the center of Creation.

Proposition 2: Creation is good

God's assessment of creation on each of the "days" of creation is this: *God saw that it was good.* [Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25]

Many of us have created objects from clay or papier-mâché at some point in time. For most of us, our creations are mediocre at best. For a few, your work stands above the rest. God's work of creation stands above all other creative activities. God could look at Creation and say, "Now that is good!"

What is "good" about creation? The answer goes beyond the aesthetic beauty of the heavens and earth. Creation is good because it tells us about God.

- Psalm 19 begins, *The heavens declare the glory of God.* [Psalm 19:1]
- Romans 1 points out: *What may be known about God is plain, because God has made it plain. Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.* [Romans 1: 19 – 20]

While the best picture of God is seen in the life of Jesus who embodied God in flesh, Creation has much to tell us about God: 1) the God of Wonders who is holy; 2) the God who is mighty; 3) the God of loving care and intimate detail; 4) the God who takes pleasure in delighting people.

Creation is good. It tells us about God.

Proposition 3: Humans are a part of God's creation

The LORD God formed the man (human) from the dust of the ground (humus) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. [Genesis 2:7]

People are not an afterthought of God's design. People are the apex of God's creative process ~ the final and best work of God. And humans, who culminate the creative process, are created in the image of God.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. [Genesis 1: 26-27]

Females and males both bear the image of God. Now I have to admit that there are days when I roll out of bed and look in the mirror that I question this proposition. ☺ Truth is, you and I are created in the image of God.

What does it mean to be created in God's image? This may be a subject for a more extensive presentation at another time. But quickly, to be in the likeness of God means we resemble God in ways that the rest of creation does not. To be in God's likeness means we are:

- **Spiritual.** We have an eternal side. God breathed into us the breath of life and we became living beings.
- **Rational.** We are intellectual. We are able to think and reason and create. We can figure stuff out.
- **Moral.** We are able to discern right from wrong & choose how we will act.
- And, we are **Relational.** God said, let “us” make Adam in “our” image after “our” likeness. Like God, we are made to interact with and enjoy the company of others. It was not good for the man to be alone. We have been made for relationships.

This part of God’s creation has a unique distinction. This part of creation, the creation of people, is not just good, but “very good.”

When God finished the work of Creation, God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. [Genesis 1:31]

Proposition 4: Creation belongs to God

In our culture, we say possession is 9/10ths of the law. Not so with creation. We may move the dirt around and change the path of a river. We may drill deep into the earth’s core to mine its resources. We may explore the depths of the oceans and heavenly bodies. Our actions may alter the climate—still, the earth does not belong to us. The Earth belongs to God.

In his hand are the depths of the earth, the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, his hands formed the dry land. [Psalm 95:4-5]

The earth is the LORD's, & everything in it, the world, & all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. [Psalm 24:1-2]

Creation belongs to God.

Proposition 5: God cares for the Creation

At some level, most of us know the story of Noah and the flood. As the waters receded and the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat, God made a covenant that went beyond just a promise to Noah and his family.

*Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you **and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth.** I have set my rainbow in the clouds and it will be the sign of the **covenant between me and the earth.** Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant **I have established between me and all life on the earth.**" [Genesis 9:8-17]*

The behaviors of sinful people disturbed God so much that a Flood was sent as a corrective. What also disturbed God was the impact of the Great Flood on Creation. It pained God to see the destruction of all that had been so intricately fashioned. *Never again! Never again will I send a flood to destroy life. This is my covenant with all of life on the earth.*

A friend of ours is building a log cabin up north. The design and the construction of this cabin have his stamp all over them. He has never ever attempted any project like this before. It is fun to watch his Facebook page where he posts pictures of the progress as the cabin takes shape. More than the pictures, we hear in his words a deep sense of satisfaction about what he is creating. I know that with each log he lays in place there is feeling of contentment and pride. It belongs to him and if anything happened to his creation, he would be brokenhearted.

God cares for the creation and God cares so much that God gave care for Creation to us.

Proposition 6: We are stewards of Creation

*Then God said, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. **Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.**" [Genesis 1:26-28]*

*Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden **to work it and take care of it.** [Genesis 2:8-15]*

In Psalm 8 David the Shepherd writes: *You made us rulers over the works of your hands and put everything under our feet.* [Psalm 8:6]

The God who made it all, to whom all of life belongs, has asked us, the highest of Creation, to be the gardeners—to tend and care for Creation.

How are we doing?

Well, it's not *all* bad news. We know how to stop erosion. We have learned how to maximize our crops to get the greatest yields. We have the tools to re-forest after harvesting lumber. The California condor, the sandhill crane, the gray wolf, and the Bald Eagle have all made astonishing comebacks. The air in LA is better now than it was 30 years ago. The Cuyahoga River in Ohio no longer catches fire and Lake Erie is recovering as a viable fishery. These are causes for real celebration and hope

Yet, if truth be told, the state of the planet is not all sweetness and light. There is much that is not the way it is supposed to be. The fact is, in many ways.

Proposition 7: Creation is broken by human sinfulness

Because of the sin of the first people, God said to Adam and Eve, *"Cursed is the ground because of you."* [Genesis 3: 17]

In the book of Romans, Paul writes: *"...with eager hope, creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that **all creation has been groaning** as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.* [Romans 8:20-23]

Creation is groaning. Perhaps we have not the best stewards, the best gardeners in caring for the earth.

In his book, For the Beauty of The Earth, Steven Bouma-Prediger, writes: “*We Christians have not always been good earth-keepers. While the Christian faith is not necessarily anti-ecological, we have all too often acted as if it were. Many of our beliefs, habits, and practices have in fact not served the earth but rather despoiled it.*” [pg.79]

Perhaps we have taken the notion of “having dominion over” creation to mean that “The Good Earth” is for our consumption. It belongs to us. We can do with it as we choose. But it does not belong to us, it belongs to God, and we are called to tend and care for The Creator’s precious handiwork.

Perhaps we have read a passage like 2 Peter 3:10 which states, *The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare, and we think to ourselves: “Since it will all be destroyed one day, and since God will fashion a new heaven and earth, what difference does it make what happens to this temporary dwelling place?”*

The promise that God will create a new heaven and earth one day does not mean the appointment given to people to tend and care for The Creator’s precious handiwork has been lifted.

Creation is broken and we have work to do.

So how are we to respond to the charge to care for God’s Earth?

1. We are to BE FAITHFUL to the task of Earth Care.

1 Corinthians 4:2 tells us, *A person who is put in charge as a manager (steward) must be faithful.* (NLT)

Regardless of our political perspectives, regardless of our Biblical interpretations, regardless of the enormity of the task, we are called to be faithful in caring for God’s Creation.

2. So we will CONSERVE our resources: will use our resources wisely.

This is not as easy as it sounds. Around our house we compost everything we can; we recycle every scrap of paper, every can, every bottle, every plastic bag; I have learned to drive our minivan in ways that increase the mileage by 20%. Yet, we may not be as good with water use and I am not sure that we are doing all we can with natural gas and electricity. The call to Creation Care can be difficult.

At CPC the staff has formed a “Green Team.” In May, the Green Team reported that we have replaced ballasts and light bulbs and switches to be much more efficient. We are turning off lights when we leave rooms. We are using our own washable mugs and glasses instead of Styrofoam. The Green Team went to the waste management plant and learned how our co-mingled disposables are handled. We learned that anytime food comes in contact with recyclables the recyclable material becomes contaminated and goes to the landfill. So, we *planned* to have waste containers for food contaminated products that are separate from the co-mingled recyclables . . . but, that change has not happened yet. We are working at it. Creation care is a work in progress.

3. Not only will we conserve, we will **PRESERVE** our resources.

The Amish have a saying that, "*The earth is on loan from our children.*"

This is similar to the words of King Solomon: *Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.* [Ecclesiastes 1:4]

A church I know of owns several acres of land that are removed from their primary property. three acres in the middle of this parcel are potentially buildable; the surrounding acres are mostly wetlands with some tamarack trees. Wouldn't it be wonderful if they donated their land to the city to be kept for green space or park preservation? I thought it was a good idea 😊.

What steps will we take to preserve our resources?

4. We will conserve and preserve and **REVERE** our resources. We will show respect and reverence for all of life.

You may not care much about the spotted owl or the West Indian Mantee but all of creation matters. Thomas A Kempis, a Medieval Monk said, *There is no creature so small and abject, but it reflects the goodness of God.*

How will we revere our resources?

And this is where I need your help. ***I would like to hear what steps you are taking to conserve, preserve and revere God's creation.***

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Last Sunday I had finished the sermon and turned in the text for the Power Point slides. And then in the afternoon I picked up the paper and read this headline ~ ***Global Warning***. The brief Star Tribune article noted that we have just come through the hottest year in recorded global history and that the impact of global warming can be seen in devastating drought and intense rains. The rising temperatures caused a 100 square mile chunk of glacial ice to break off into the Arctic Ocean. When I read these words I felt like all my/our small efforts ~ while good ~ are not enough.

Earth's crisis calls for a bigger response. It is a political, governmental, international issue. While this is not the only cause, it makes sense that when we go to our polling places, our ballots will take the issue of Earth Care into account. We can inform our elected officials and state our concerns at the voting booth and with our e-mails and letters. To me, this does not seem optional. Creation is groaning—and we are the Gardeners.

Fifteen plus years after I delivered that first sermon about Creation Care, I am not sure exactly what you have heard today or how you have heard these words. But please hear this: ***Regardless of our political perspectives, regardless of our Biblical interpretations, regardless of the enormity of the task, we are called by God to be faithful in caring for God's Creation.***

Let me close with these words by **Cecil Frances Alexander**:

All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.

Each little flower that opens,
Each little bird that sings,
He made their glowing colours,
He made their tiny wings.

The purple-headed mountain,
The river running by,
The sunset, and the morning,
That brightens up the sky;

The cold wind in the winter,
The pleasant summer sun,
The ripe fruits in the garden,
He made them every one.

The tall trees in the greenwood,
The meadows where we play,
The rushes by the water,
We gather every day;--

He gave us eyes to see them,
And lips that we might tell,
How great is God Almighty,
Who has made all things well.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.

Additional Resources

Internet Resources:

- Care of Creation <http://www.careofcreation.net/>
- Earth Ministry <http://earthministry.org/>
- Saving God's Green Earth <http://savinggodsgreeneearth.com/>

Books:

- For The Beauty of The Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care, Steven Bouma-Prediger, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI
- Saving God's Green Earth, Tri Robinson, Ampleon Publishing, Norcross, GA
- Hope for Creation, Matthew Sleeth, MD, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, DVD & Study Guide

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OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CREATION, A Bible Study (From Vineyard Boise Church, Boise, Idaho)

I. Have dominion - Gen. 1:28; 9:1-2. What does having dominion mean to you?

II. Dominion linked to our relationship to God.

A. As image bearers - Gen 1:26-27. What characteristics of God do you think we bear?

B. With humility toward the sovereign God - Ps. 8; Ps. 144:3-4 & 15. Do these passages alter your view of having dominion? If yes, how? How do they differ from the concept of dominion prevalent in society?

C. Examples of Godly rule - Deut. 17:14-20 and Ps. 72. Our brotherhood with other earthly creatures is implicit in our having been made from dust (earthly material), just as other creatures. Adam's name is derived from Hebrew for dust (Adama). If we, therefore, are earthly brothers with other creatures, what would these examples suggest about how we should rule?

D. Dominion in Eden.

1. Stewardship - Gen. 2:15. What duty was Adam given as part of the privilege of living in God's Eden?

2. Working with God - Gen 2:19-20. The act of naming in Hebrew culture implies that the namer knows intimately the one receiving the name. What does this passage suggest about Adam's relationship to the rest of creation?

III. Dominion always comes with guidelines, duties and responsibilities. Some examples:

A. Land - Lev. 25:1-5 rules of fallowing; Lev. 25:23 rules of ownership. Do we presently follow these guidelines? If not, why not?

B. Beasts - Deut. 25:4, 22:10. Give an example of a current law regulating the treatment of animals. Given your concept of dominion, describe an area where you think the current laws are inadequate?

C. Wildlife - Deut. 22:6. Give an example of a current law regulating the treatment of wild animals. Given your concept of dominion, describe a way that laws (or attitudes) could be improved.

D. Plantlife.

1. Harvest - Lev. 23:22, 19:9-10. Do we presently follow these guidelines? If not, why not?
2. Fruit trees - Lev. 19:23-25. Why was this law important? Is it still important today?
3. Trees - Deut. 20:19-20. Do we currently have any environmental guidelines for times of war? If yes, describe one. If not, what is one that you would suggest.

IV. God's relationship with the creation.

A. God gives breath - Ps. 104:29-30. To what kind(s) of creatures does God give breath? Does God still do this today?

B. God cares for creation - Gen. 6:11-13, 17-22; Mat. 6:26. According to these passages, what kind(s) of creatures does God care about?

C. God's ownership - 1 Chr. 29:10-19; Deut. 10:12-15; Ps. 24:1-5; Ps. 50:9-12. These passages contrast sharply with our modern secularization of the earth and its resources. What does secularization mean? What do these passages reveal about your relationship with nature and how God wants you to live?

V. The creation is marred by our sin and healed by renewed relationship with God (especially salvation through Jesus Christ)

A. The effects of sin - Gen 3:17, 18; 2 Chr. 7:11-15. What effect does our sin seem to have upon the land?

B. The relationship between man and creature - Gen 8:20-9:7. What effect does sin seem to have upon our relationship with animals?

C. Jesus Christ reconciles - Col. 1:15-23. What effect(s) does salvation through Jesus Christ have upon our relationship with the creation?

D. The awaited shalom - Rm. 8:18-23; Is. 55:10-13. Shalom refers to a thorough, multifaceted peace. How do these passages depict shalom, especially with regard to nature?

Reread your first answer. What does having dominion mean to you?

Global Stewardship: The Christian Mandate

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. (Hebrews 1:1, 2 NIV)

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.... This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. (Col. 1:15-20, 23 NIV)

Stewardship begins with the understanding that God in Jesus Christ has created and now sustains the world, and that the creation has been entrusted to humans, who were created in God's image. At the same time we are creatures, shaped by the same processes and embedded in the same systems of physical, chemical, and biological interconnections which sustain other creatures. Although it is appropriate to use the creation to meet our needs and to build human culture, scripture teaches that the chief purpose of creation is to glorify God. As we make use of creation and carry out our stewardly care, we must ensure that creation continues to testify to God's glory.

Stewardship care is therefore a trust from God. This care includes all creation and the human cultures built from it. Stewardship especially implies promoting just relationships among humans, and between humans and the rest of creation. This concern for justice is crucial for the developing world, where poverty often leaves people without land, food or health.

Stewardly care is informed by the interaction of science, ethics, and social and political institutions. Global stewardship embraces the entire planet, including land, water, air and all life - the biosphere. Because small, local or regional ecological activities, when multiplied, potentially impact the biosphere, most human activities relate to global stewardship.

A Biblical ethic for stewardship includes, among others, the following conserving elements:

1. Earthkeeping - our charge is to serve and keep the creation with all its dynamic integrity and fullness.
2. Fruitfulness - while using the fruit of creation, we should never destroy creation's ability to be replenished.
3. Restoration/Sabbath - we should provide for the restoration of the ecosystems we have used or misused.
4. Justice - we must ensure that all humankind - future as well as present - enjoy the gifts of creation and are not impoverished by unjust or unwise use of those gifts.

There are many ways in which good stewardship has been practiced around the world. It is also evident, however, that North Americans have not always been faithful to our stewardly calling. The creation has been degraded by our misuse of the environment and our failure to treat all people justly. It is good news for humans and all of creation that God in Christ continues to care for his creation and is reconciling all things to himself. The atoning work of Christ on the cross has opened the door to reconciliation with God, and we are privileged to be ministers of that reconciliation. Stewardly care, therefore, involves participating with Christ in sharing this good news and in bringing healing to both human and non-human creation, foreshadowing that time when the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness, and all creation is whole.

Global stewardship today entails addressing the intricate relationship between environmental degradation, resource consumption, population growth and the means of production of goods and their use. Christians are glad to unite with all those who share a concern for creation in bringing stewardly care to human culture and the natural systems on which we depend. In particular, those people and institutions which are explicitly Christian have a special responsibility to promote learning, research and living - our spiritual service - that will lead to faithful stewardly care of the creation, as they honor God who has entrusted the gift of creation to humankind.

The statement titled "Global Stewardship: The Christian Mandate" was developed and approved by the faculty from 25 [Coalition for Christian Colleges and Universities \(CCCU\)](#) institutions who participated in the 1995-96 CCCU Global Stewardship Initiative funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and administered by the Center for Christian Studies at Gordon College. It was subsequently endorsed by the Presidents' Council of the CCCU, and sent to the presidents of the 91 member institutions of the CCCU with an encouragement to initiate further global stewardship programming on these campuses. Project Director-Harold Heie