

Sermon for April 24, 2016
Earth Day
"Environmental Stewardship 101"

Genesis 1:26-31, 2:4-8, 15

It all started back when God stepped out into nothingness and said, "Lights!" Suddenly photons and electromagnetic waves from infrared to ultraviolet burst into existence. God saw that the light was good, so God separated the light from the darkness, and called the light "day" and darkness "night." Day 1.

God then said, "Let there be up and down." The up God called "sky." Day 2.

Then God separated the water from the not water and called the water "seas" and the not water "land." It was good. So God said "Let's cover the land with plants," and a lush cover of vegetation grew up with trees and bushes and grasses and flowers. That was good too. Day 3.

And God said, "Let's put lights in the sky to measure times and days and seasons." So God put a big light for the day and a smaller light for the night, along with the stars. God liked it. Day 4.

Then God said, "Let's fill the waters and sky with creatures and let's have birds in the air." And every kind of sea creature came into existence from plankton and krill, to great tuna and sharks and whales. All kinds of birds came into existence. God liked it, so God blessed them and said "Have offspring and multiply and fill the oceans and the air." That was good! Day 5.

Then God said, "Let there be creatures on the land too!" and all kind of creatures that roar and bark and squeak and burrow and run and leap came into existence. As God watched them go about their business, God was proud. Then God said, to no one in particular because there was no one yet to listen, "Somethings missing. Let's make a creature like us, that can rule over the land and sea and air and all the creatures there. Something, no someone, like us." So God made people with the ability to rule over their environment. In God's image both men and women were made. God blessed them and said "Multiply and cover the earth so that you can rule over everything that swims and runs and flies and digs. And all the vegetable and grains and fruits are yours to eat and for the creatures." And God looked at it all and said, "I like that very much." Day 6.

At dawn on day 7 God was admiring all the creation and said, "I deserve a day off. Humans, you mind the store."

The constant refrain in Chapter 1 of Genesis is "And it was good." The last thing God does in this good creation is create human beings in God's own image. And God gives the human race "dominion" over all these good things that God has created. Humans are told to rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and all that lives on the earth.

If you stop and think about it, we do have dominion over the world. We are the one species that is able to understand the world enough to make drastic changes in the environment. Sometimes this has been for the bad. We have often destroyed environments and pushed species into extinction. But we are also able use our understanding and ability to preserve or restore environments, and bring species back from the brink of extinction.

The question is: what does this dominion mean? Is it a God given license to do whatever we want with the good creation? Or is it a responsibility to care for and manage the environment? We have great power, and as a great moral philosopher of our day has said, "With great power comes great responsibility." O.K.. it was Stan Lee, the creator of Spiderman, who said that. But it's true, God has given the human race great power: power to create and power to destroy. How then should we use this power of dominion?

This is where the idea of stewardship comes in; specifically environmental stewardship. We usually associate the word "stewardship" with fund raising in the church. But theologically the idea is much broader. It is the idea that something has been entrusted to us and we are to be good stewards or caretakers of those things. God has given us our material wealth. Being good stewards of that material wealth includes how much of it we contribute to religious institutions. But there is so much more to stewardship.

God has given us gifts and abilities and opportunities. God has given us a good creation and given

us dominion over it. The good Earth belongs to God, but God has given us responsibility to care for it. This idea is also expressed in chapter 2 of Genesis. God formed the first human out of the dust of the ground and then gave that human the task of caring for the garden.

God has given us the physical and mental ability to manipulate the environment. But God has also given us the moral ability to judge the good and bad ways of manipulating our environment. God has planted a lush garden with a variety and diversity of animals and plants. And God has placed us in this garden we call Earth and told us to care for it. That is Environmental Stewardship: caring for God's good Earth, tilling the garden.

How can we be good stewards? There are a lot of ways we can live out environmental stewardship. The three R's or environmental stewardship are "Reduce, Reuse and Recycle." We can Reduce our impact on the environment. We can adjust our thermostats to save energy. We can drive slower and more responsibly. We can replace old incandescent and CFL (Compact Florescent or "squiggly" light bulbs) with more efficient and environmentally friendly LED's (Light Emitting Diodes).

We can learn to Reuse instead of throwing away. Sometimes this is a choice. Use real plates and cloth napkins instead of disposable ones. Find ways to repurpose old things even if it is giving them away to charity: did you know we have a yard sale here?

We can also Recycle. Probably half of the things we usually throw away can be recycled. Most plastics, paper, cardboard, aluminum, cans and glass are recycled by the city and county. Making things from recycled items is better for the environment. Recycling not only reduces waste put in the landfills but is costs less, uses less energy and reduces the harvesting of natural resources from the environment, than making plastic, glass, and metals from raw materials. Recycling is a win-win-win proposition. It is good for the environment, business, and community.

A basic concept behind all of this is "sustainability." Can we keep living the way we are for an indefinite period of time? Is our way of life sustainable? The answer is no! If we keep burning natural gas and coal to generate our electricity, and gasoline to fuel our cars, we will run out of those things. We need to switch over to more sustainable options like wind, solar, and nuclear.

If we continue down the path we are on our children and grandchildren will be left in the lurch. We are spending our children's environmental inheritance and they will have to pay the bill. We need to start establishing ways of being environmentally friendly, of being good stewards now. Then in future generations they will be set to be able to feed, house, and cloth the billions of people on this planet. We need to care for the garden now or it will not be able to feed the people who follow us.

Now let's talk about the 800 lb. gorilla in the room, the biggest sustainability issue: climate change. Let's call it what it is "Global Warming!" The earth as a whole is getting warmer. If you don't believe me go to climate.nasa.gov and you can see the overwhelming evidence there. The earth is getting warmer, the polar ice sheets are getting smaller, and sea levels are rising. One of the main culprits is CO₂ which comes from burning fossil fuels. Over the last 650,000 it has varied, but never above 300 part per million. Since the beginning of the 1950's CO₂ levels have shot up to 400 part per million, far beyond where it has been in the last half a million years. Most scientist agree humans are at least a major contributor to this trend, and if we don't do something about it our descendants will pay the price.

In the beginning God created the universe with all its wonders and it was good. God placed us in this garden with all these wonderful animals and plants that we can use for food and medicines and materials. But God also gave us responsibility to care for it. Theologically speaking God made us stewards of this earth that God said is good. Sometimes we have not been good stewards. But we have a responsibility to take care of the environment, not just for us or for God but for future generations.

This has been your class in Environmental Stewardship 101: The key point are: 1. We have the God given power and responsibility for tending the garden. 2. The 3 R's are: Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. 3. Our goal is to create a sustainable lifestyle that maintains the Earth for future generations.

Now the test. Put away your #2 pencils. The test is not a written one. To pass this course you have to change your life. In faithfulness to God, seek ways to care for the garden. Put sustainability into practice and advocate that others, including governments, find ways to care for the garden.

God said, "It is good." Let's help God keep it that way!