

Sermon #3 Series on the Church

We are Called to be the Church – to live with respect in Creation...

JIM SHORT

Sunday May 16th, 2010 – Ladner United Church

0900 and 1100hrs

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Our first lesson is from the Book of Genesis – the story of Creation. (Pause)

The Bible begins with a poetic mini-saga of God's creative activity taking place over six days and God resting on the Sabbath. This passage is not a scientific treatise that tells us how the world was created but rather it is a theological one which seeks to explain to us why the world was created by God and what our role, place and relationship as humans' beings is.

This long passage teaches us several things about creation:

- Creation was planned and orderly; note the progression on each of the days of creation.
- Human beings are created in the image of God
- Human beings were immediately given a leadership role
- Human beings were provided for
- God was satisfied with creation; in the beginning creation was not flawed in any way.
- From the beginning we see that work was followed by reflection and rest. God created (worked) and then reflected at the end of each day. *This is good!* On the seventh day, God rested from labor. We were given an example of Sabbath rest as well as the later commandment to rest on the Sabbath

This key passage of the Hebrew Scriptures sets an important place for us to begin what it means as Christian people to live, as the New Creed suggests with respect in creation.

The Bible suggests that God created the universe as a home for us to live in, with all living creatures working together in time and space.

Use your imagination and your heart to hear and see the beauty of the poetry of this magnificent passage. (Pause)

Reading from Genesis, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2: verses 1 to 3: (Pause)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

² Now the earth was ^[a] formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

⁶ And God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." ⁷ So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. ⁸ God called the expanse "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

⁹ And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.

¹¹ Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. ¹² The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. ¹⁶ God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." ²¹ So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water

teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²²God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." ²³And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth,^[b] and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "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."

²⁹ Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

¹ Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

² By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested ^[a] from all his work. ³ And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

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Our Gospel lesson is from Luke. (Pause)

The story of the Good Samaritan is very familiar to many Christians. Our immediate thought is to use this story to understand our relationship to our neighbor – which relationship of sacrificial love God calls us to. Our neighbor might be someone in our family, a neighbor on the street, someone we go to school with or work with, a stranger we run across or someone from another culture or country that we reach out to help.

What if this story also speaks about “Creation” as our neighbor? What does it mean to love “Creation” as we love ourselves? In that sense who is the Samaritan and who might be the ones who pass “Creation” on the other side.

The question Jesus asks us to learn from is simple: Who was neighbor to the man beaten and left to die?

The literal answer the expert gave was "The one who did mercy with him". Jesus' response, "Go on your way and do likewise" is exactly his response to us. The invitation here is for us to quit "feeling" merciful and actually start "doing" mercy with those in need, whoever they are and whoever we think we are. Perhaps it is “Creation” who is in need of mercy. (Pause)

Reading from Chapter 10: vs. 25-37: (pause)

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 26He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” 27He answered, “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.”28And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” 29But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” 30Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. 31Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35The next day he took out two

denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' 36Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" 37He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

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Along with the scriptures, in preparation for the sermon time, please turn in your Voices United Hymn Books to page 918 and we will say together the words of the New Creed (give people time to find the reference in the hymn book)

Let us repeat together:

We are not alone,
we live in God's world.

We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.

We are not alone.

Thanks be to God.

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Maya the Meditations of our hearts and the words of my lips if they be your words, be worthy and acceptable to you and may your words come to your people either through me or despite me...amen.

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Its good to be reminded of our place in creation...

On Monday my spouse Cathy was asked to preside over a scattering of the ashes service for a friend of ours who – while I was in was in Afghanistan – died and Cathy had led the memorial service...

We gathered in a large beautiful park in Langley – a conservation area and we went to a section that was like a natural sanctuary where this man had spent lots of time, meditating, walking with his wife, playing with his children, coming there to think...it was a place he dearly loved...

A large circle of flowering trees making it a kind of natural sanctuary surrounds this large field – with wild grasses...

In this field...we were far enough away from the human sounds of the city and hiway to enjoy the silence and the sounds of nature....

We gathered and shared in a brief ceremony...and Cathy invited us each at one point to go to a part of the field and spend some time simply enjoying the beauty of the place...

I was aware that this week I would preach on the part of the creed that says – We are called to be the church...(last week to we spoke of to celebrate God's presence...)

And this week...to live in respect with Creation...

In my own spiritual journey, despite living in this beautiful part of the world – I am not one to regularly head out into nature and mediate...

But during this ceremony – I was aware of two realities...

As Elizabeth Barrett Browning said:

Earth's crammed with heaven and every common bush afire with God but only those who sees take off their shoes

As we walked in silence...I stopped to look at a flowering tree – it was not particularly magnificent or beautiful

Small white pedal shaped flowers about the size of my baby fingertip with a circle of short green pollen rods at the center – and as I touched it – I thought – Despite all the knowledge and power that humans have – we did not create this – nor do we control its growth and eventual death...there is a powerful mystery in creation that is beyond human beings...

And then at the end of the ceremony – each person has taken a scoop of our friend's ashes...and I finished the task of scattering his remaining ashes in the park...and I was struck by

The cycle of human life – Adam (the human) made from the dust of the earth – made from the same element that God created the trees, the earth, the animals, the plants from – again a process we do not control – and then death comes – we are dust and to the dust we shall return...

I need times like this I thought to remember what a wonders the world is – that it is more than human made and I so I do not forget that even though humans invented the computer and the internet and the IPOD and IPHONE and all else that may be good

– all those things are still made up of things processed and manufactured that we did not create – in the beginning...

As Abraham Heschel the Jewish Theologian is quoted as saying

“Forget Awe and we turn the world into a market place” (quoted by Bruce Sanqin in his book Darwin, Divinity and the Dance of the Cosmos)

And I found myself reflecting – as I thought about the beauty of this place – and things such as the oil spill off the Coast of Louisiana – how easily we humans can destroy this creation that we did not make and are but a part of...

To live with respect in creation...like celebrating God’s presence

Is identified by the Creed as being very important for the Church...I think because

...What God calls us to do...that’s the next part of the creed...

To love and serve others,
To seek justice and resist evil,
To proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
Our judge and our hope.

Cannot be lived out unless we have first grounded ourselves in worship to God and then understood the nature of our relationship to all of creation...

And understood what our relationship is like to all of God's creation – the physical world and the people, animals, plants, waters, land, sea, sky within it

Because if we have not

If we are not anchored ourselves...we will not be able to fulfill God's other commands...

Without worship – giving our worth ship to God...and the awareness that we are called to live with respect in creation

We will make ourselves, our desires, our wants into idols – we will believe that we are "God" and we can do what we want when we want...

A kind of spiritual, mental, physical, relational anarchy will and does reign supreme in those places where we forget or chose to live not respectfully...

A living our of respect – a disrespect of the natural order of the world...

That is how the bible defines "sin" – we find that a hard word because we believe it to be a definition of our worth and value...

A kind of putting down of our being and a sense we are miserable and worthless...

It's actually a theological category...

To be a sinner

To be in sin

Is to be living the relationship that Jesus said was central to all of life...

To God with your whole being and your neighbor as yourself – it is to have the ordering of that

Wrong – out of perspective or kilter

It is to love myself – first – at the expense of God and others...

And Jesus came

To right that relationship and by grace – as an expression of God's covenantal love for us

To by his life, death and resurrection – to re-align that relationship...

And we live in times when the need for a realignment of living in creation with respect

Has taken on life threatening proportions...

The New Creed was written – in the 1960's – well before the Environmental movement

Had become a mainstream commitment for many people...and being an environmentalist was considered honorable and worthy...

Well before the science of Global warming...well before this time in which before our eyes

We watch

Temperatures rise

Global weather patterns shifting

Bringing flooding and drought and hurricanes – affecting water levels and availability, food supply

When the New Creed was written...

We had not yet fully began to understand that the negative effects of the Industrial Revolution in the Western World

Could bring us prosperity not rivaled in any other time – But could also mean the potential death and destruction of the world

When the New Creed was written – at the height of the Cold War – we believed that the only way that creation might be destroyed was if some mad man (and it would have been a man) launched a massive atomic missile strike...

The doctrine of MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) – if I do it to you – you will do it to me – kept us – we believed – safe

But now – we live in times when our past actions – and our addiction to present actions has set in motions forces and directions – that we may be powerless to stop...

And our life style – like the pursuit of “cheap oil” – has created disasters such as the present one off the Louisiana Coast – that threatens unparalleled destruction of the ocean, the coast and people’s livelihoods...

And if you want to see environmental sin...relationships out of whack...

Realize that as the oil flows off Louisiana...

The same company – BP – is asking our government for safety relaxations on oil drilling in Canadian waters – they want an exemption from drilling relief wells which provide a kind of second chance if the main well malfunctions

With the “promise” that it could never happen here...

....

The poetry of the Hebrew Scriptures is magnificent and awe inspiring... – it is what one author calls “a mini saga”...

And it is placed right at the beginning of the scriptures deliberately...

To help us understand

Our relationship to God and the created world...

Dan Clendenin, an American Author gives us this example to understand what this initial chapters of Genesis is about:

He says – that its profound meaning has been dismissed by critics and fundamentalists alike:

Often – Christians will ask – do you believe the world was created in six days – as if that is the key message of the script?

To approach Genesis on that level he says – is to ask why a painting by Picasso or William Blake is not more realistic...

Genesis, he says – does not enlighten us about history, cosmology or science, as we understand it. They never intended to do that and even if that was their intent, their science and history would have been outmoded shortly after the author wrote. Just like our own science of 50 years ago seems outmoded today – and how rudimentary today’s science will look in 3000 years (about the date of the Genesis science) (Dan Clendenin – The Journey with Jesus – Notes to

Myself – May 12, 1020- The Poetry of Creation –
Internet)

So what does it say?

There was a time when all that was – was formless
and a void

But God existed – and hovering and brooding over
the formless

Void

In a series of spectacular acts

God created everything... (Stewardship of Creation –
Center for Christian Ethics Baylor University)

- The creation has its origins in the sovereign, creative and sustaining power of God – it is centered on God – Theo centric
- Creation is not a singular event – it is an ongoing sustaining process requiring the presence of God
- It is relational – everything included humans has an appointed place and function within the grand design
- It is good – God has filled creation with meaning and value, goodness and beauty
- God is transcendent (above) but also imminent (within) creation discloses both the nature of God and the human role within God's world...

Notice God did not create us humans – first...

Might be good to remember that sometimes – we were last

There is an old rabbinic teaching that goes like this:
(Jesus 7/24 – p. 78)

Question – Why did God create human beings last

Answer: So God could say to us “Look at all I have done for you...and without you.”

Humans are related to creation:

We share the same make up as the earth (from dust)

And the same breath that the animals have...within this complex relationship

We are not separate or better than creation – we are related to it

We are put in the “garden” to work

And the work is to serve the ground and administer the animals...

The Biblical word is

“Stewardship”

We are Stewards

In Biblical times – the Steward was an employee who managed the estate of its owner in his or her absence...had to make decisions and choices but was

not the owner and therefore could not do whatever they wanted...act within certain parameters...

Israel's Kings ruled the chosen people of Israel as God's representative and so was accountable to God...

The thought of image, likeness suggests statues of Kings and Monarchs put up to remind their subjects of who is in power...

So if you and I are made in the image of God...and the likeness of God – it reminds us that we are to be living reminders, reflections on the one God who is in power...

All of creation reflects that love and is loved:

From Julian of Norwich, Showings

"And in this he showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed to me, and it was as round as a ball. I looked at it with the eye of my understanding and thought: What can this be? I was amazed that it could last, for I thought that because of its littleness, it would suddenly have fallen into nothing. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and always will, because God loves it; and thus everything has being through the love of God."

...and in that sense...

Our human life, every person's human life – not just mine here or yours has purpose and meaning and value...

Not owners which means we are not free to do whatever we want to with creation...

And we are not free to "own" creation for ourselves and think only of say us in Canada or North America

If the story is true...

I was created...not to think only of myself...

Not to think only of my family...my race...my religion...our generation...and it is anti the story

To believe that

I – as a white North American male living in Canada has somehow more claim to anything in creation than a person living

In a place like Ethiopia or Somalia...

And that is important to know because some times Christians have been guilty:

War – greatest polluters in the world are the World's military and the military industrial complex

Afghanistan – US has refused consistently to sign the international treaties to ban landmines or Cluster bombs (they explode above the ground and scattered individual bombs – 30-40% of them don't explode

upon contact and are left as dangerous unexploded ordinance)

Jesus would have been I suspect a deep friend of the environmental movement...and when our Moderator Marti Tindall went to the Copenhagen Environmental Summit with a delegation from the United Church of Canada...I believe – though some church groups did not – that God would approve and Jesus would have been there too...

I suggested in the material I prepared for the scripture lessons that we might interpret the familiar parable of the Good Samaritan in light of the creation...

Let's imagine – it is not just about the Jewish person...

Take it out of the time image of Palestine in Jesus' day...

On the road the robbers have attacked creation

(Bruce Sainquin IBID) page 147

Habitat loss

Invasive species

Pollution and global warming

Human overpopulation

Over harvesting – hunting, fishing, gathering

Who...is creation?

It is the women in Darfur who are raped by rogue militaries as an extension of the conflict

It is the starving person in Ethiopia who has no food

It is the family in Afghanistan or in any other warm torn country living in fear

A Mentally ill person struggling to find services

It is the ocean that the Book of Genesis speaks of – its water and creatures being fouled with the oil from a burst pipeline

Is it one of the various species of plants and animals that goes extinct (estimated 30 to 150 every day)?

Jesus challenges the lawyer who asks him the question – what must I do to inherit eternal life

Who will be the neighbor to the creation?

And who and what is enemy?

To live with respect in creation – Friends, go and do likewise...