

**THIS IS MY FATHER'S WORLD**  
**(I Just Live Here)**  
**Psalm 8 ~ Colossians 1:15-20**  
**Preached by Dr. Cahill**  
**Babcock Presbyterian Church**  
**Sunday, April 29, 2012**

Years ago, in my former life, I was on the staff of a summer camp in Vermont. Twice each season I led canoe trips on either Lake George or the Saranac Lakes in the Adirondack Mountains in upper New York. One night after making sure the campers were sound asleep in their tents, the other trip leader and I quietly placed one of the canoes in the water and paddled out to the middle of the pond. The water was still and all was quiet when suddenly a full moon came out from behind the cloud transforming the still waters into a glass mirror that brightly reflected the trees lining the shore line. We both sat there in the middle of that pond stunned, neither saying a word for the longest time, silenced by the wonder of it all until another cloud covered the moon which was our cue to paddle back to shore.

I also fondly remember many more moonless nights, looking up at all the stars scattered across the heavens, always with the bright Milky Way cutting a wide bright swath through the middle of the sky.

Being far from any towns or cities there was no light pollution, allowing us to see the same number of countless stars God promised Abraham would equal the number of his descendants destined to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth.

*O Lord, our Sovereign  
how majestic is your name  
in all the earth...  
When I look at your heavens  
the work of your fingers  
the moon and the stars that  
you have established  
what are human beings that  
you are mindful of them  
mortals that you care for them.*  
(Psalm 8:1; 3-4)

Here the psalmist declares the glory of creation as well as a healthy yet humble understanding of man's place and role in the universe.

*Yet you have made them a  
little lower than God  
and crowned them with glory  
and honor.  
You have given them dominion  
over the works of your hands  
and put all things under their feet.* (Psalm 8:5-6)

By linking the Creation stories in Genesis with God's charge to Adam to be both fruitful and multiply, and exercise dominion over the earth, the psalmist neatly sums up our responsibility to responsibly rule over the earth by being faithful stewards of his creation.

But until the last few centuries before the population explosion, industrialization and the consequential pollution of the earth reached critical mass, there wasn't any need for systematic regulation and conservation. True, 200 years ago people threw away their trash like we do, but today with population growth and synthetic products, we no longer have the luxury of making and then throwing out our garbage and industrial waste without it contaminating the soil, air and water God gave us to rule over.

But care of the creation isn't just common sense it's first and foremost a biblical mandate. True, 3,000 years ago it wasn't about saving the planet, but there was commitment to be the care takers of the land God gave them to use so they could be fruitful and multiply.

A little over one hundred years ago, Andrew Carnegie, the richest man in the world, went home to his native Scotland to scout out some property for his retirement castle. After locating the perfect spot he sought out the man who farmed the land, determined to goad him into selling it.

The farmer replied, "It's not for sale but I couldn't sell it if I wanted to. It doesn't belong to me, it belongs to my family. We've taken care of this land for generations, and God willing when I'm called home to be with God, my son will assume the responsibility and his son after him." Frustrated that anyone would dare refuse him Carnegie stomped off.

After the Hebrew's forty years of wilderness wanderings they finally came home to the Promised Land; they developed the understanding that the Land was passed on to them for a divine purpose.

Isn't it remarkable these ancient people not only discerned but also put into practice their God given insight? Then again, maybe it was from necessity. Unlike them, we can buy fruit out of season as well as vegetables and meats from all over the country, but they were totally dependent on the local harvest. If droughts or plagues destroyed their crops, they couldn't pick up the phone and order carryout.

For that reason, the Law of Moses mandated guidelines for the proper stewardship of the land. Technically, in Israel, there were no landowners, only land inheritors. Leviticus 25:23 reads, "The land must not be sold permanently because the land is mine and you are but aliens and tenants." Then, Numbers 35:33-34 also commands, "You shall not pollute the land...you shall not defile the land where you live, where I also live, for I the Lord dwell among the Israelites."

This second mandate wasn't talking about pollution in the same way we do today. Instead, polluting the land meant doing anything unethical or harmful that would defile the holy ground God let them live on because after all, "the earth is the Lord's, the earth and everything and everyone in it." Putting it another way, if you're a guest in someone's house, you respect your host by acting honestly and honorably. Likewise, we are guests in God's world, so act honestly and honorably in all things.

Certainly what was true then is true today. As far as God's concerned, even though we live in different times, nothing has really changed except we have an even greater charge to keep: take care of the creation because now we have the ability to poison the world God gave us to live in.

Environmental issues have made daily headlines over the past 40 plus years. Before the 1960's pollution seemed to be the accepted byproduct of industrialization and economic progress. Growing up three miles from Hudson River, when I was a boy it was one of the most polluted waterways in the nation. Ironically, 150 years before that the Hudson River was celebrated as one of the natural wonders of the world, but by the late 1960's it was an open sewer until concerned citizens petitioned both government and industry to clean up the mess and restore the Hudson to its original pristine condition. Happily, today there's boating and swimming and fishing on the Hudson, but fishermen are warned not to eat their catch because of the toxic chemicals still in the fish. Maybe in another hundred years...

Certainly the debate that's taken center stage over the past twenty-five years or so has been over the reality of global warming. I know there are respected scientists on both sides of the issue, each presenting their findings to make the case that industrial pollution is or isn't contributing to global warming. Not being a scientist I find myself going back and forth between whether or not industrial waste and oil consumption are powerful enough to tip the balance towards global disaster or the warnings are sincere but overstated. Even so, no matter what side of the debate you find yourself on, the biblical mandate to be responsible and just stewards of the earth, as far as I'm concerned, compels us to seek the truth and common ground.

As a people primarily informed by the word of God, we need to hold these biblical truths as self-evident: God created the earth to sustain humanity, animal life, vegetation, the soil, water and air. Everything and everyone God created has a purpose and role to play in the grand scheme of things. Everything and everyone is related to and dependent on each other. Considering all that, our calling as God's children and Christ's disciples is to take care of our world for ourselves and the generations that follow because, after all, it's the only world we've got and there's nowhere else to go.

So, what can you and I do that will make our world and its environment a fit place to be fruitful and multiply?

My first suggestion is to at least be better informed and get involved. How? Well, let me tell you some well kept secrets I know.

Are you aware of The Creation Care Group of the Presbytery of Baltimore which is committed to caring for the environment through education as well as providing opportunities to put what you've learned into action? Maybe you want to receive their monthly newsletter, always filled with items of interest and announcements of upcoming monthly events.

Did you also know our own resident scientist and Renaissance man, Dr. Bill Blair, is the current moderator of Creation Care?

Having said that, I strongly suggest if God is nudging you to explore the possibilities that lead to opportunities to become engaged in keeping and restoring the world around us you should talk with Bill and learn what you can. Why?

Because we are the Church, commanded by Christ himself to make and be the difference in the world as God calls each one of us. To be sure, not everyone is called to be involved in the Creation Care Group of Baltimore Presbytery. But all of us are called to be environmentalists, or in Bible speak: God's stewards of the earth.

Last Sunday I asked you to pick up your Bibles and prayerfully read the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, those fearless troublemakers who defied convention and spoke truth to power as they witnessed to Christ and his Gospel. Please always remember this, the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, as well as the apostles and the prophets who lived hundreds of years before them, was founded upon an ethic that determines the quality of life both in this world and the next.

Certainly central to both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures are the stories of God's many promises made and kept despite our arrogance and disobedience. We call God's patience with us "grace." But another essential component of the teachings of Christ is putting his Sermon on the Mount into practice so people of good will can work together, not to bring about a brave new world or a utopian workers paradise, but something more permanent, the Kingdom of God that is coming, not by our good works but through God's good grace. Let me make myself clear. I'm not one who believes our best intentions and efforts will create the perfect world. That idea was blasted to pieces but good in the last century. But I do believe God, through Christ, will make all things new and wonderful and good.

But my belief in that doesn't excuse me from doing something to make the difference. If I believe the good news, then I'm responsible for living up to all its implications. If God calls me to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, or even care for the earth, I then have the responsibility to do something for the sake of peace and justice on earth in accordance with Christ's Gospel of grace and love.

In Colossians, the Apostle Paul heralds the supremacy of Christ in all things both in heaven and on earth. Paul recognized Christ, the image of the invisible God, to be the agent of creation. Through Christ, all things visible and invisible were created through him and for him. What's more, it's this same Christ who keeps the creation in balance.

Does that mean we can trash the environment because Christ will somehow come down and clean up our mess? Of course not! Instead, I take it to mean we need to work with God so his truth, justice and grace can be communicated and hopefully embraced by people of good will who care about our quality of life on planet Earth. In other words, as we take action to take care of the creation, as we are able, we preach the Gospel of Christ by being good and faithful stewards of the Earth.

Let our prayer be, Holy God, help us find common ground to seek first your Kingdom so we can serve in your wonderful world. Amen.