

As Kermit the Frog Says, "It's Not Easy Being Green"

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Colossians 1: 15- 20

When Pastors Dick and Louise and I sat down to plan the summer preaching schedule and go over all the "You Asked For It" sermon subjects that you all sent in to the church, there was the usual give and take of who might tackle one subject better than the others. One member of the church asked for a sermon on environmental issues and I said, 'Gee, I think we had one on those a few years ago'. And, thank goodness before I could embarrass myself further my saying something like I remember it being a really good sermon, Dick and Louise both said, 'Yes, you gave it on Earth Day'. And low and behold, when I went back to my computer, I HAD preached a sermon two years ago about the stewardship of our environment. And, well, perhaps it was because Earth Day fell that year on the Sunday AFTER Easter (not one of our largest attended Sunday services of the year) the person asking for the sermon did not get to hear it (if that's the case - its on our website in the archives of sermons). But, the more I thought about the subject and its importance, I realized that much had changed in two years and a sermon preached on the topic today would be very different. Besides the national church's Presbyterians Restoring Creation Group asks that churches consider preaching on the topic every year so I am really one year behind!

Much has happened in two years. Two years ago, "An Inconvenient Truth" was just coming out in the movie theatres and people were debating the reality of global warming instead of deciding what to do about it. Issues that were once discussed as to their truth are addressed by our government now as a concern. Where large SUV's were popular regardless of their gas economy two years ago, people are now talking about fuel use and which cars can drive the most miles per gallon. The "Smart Car" is a smart car because of its fuel economy! You must have noticed it this summer...The cost of gasoline and the escalating costs of heating and cooling our homes is the common subject of conversation with friends. An article in the Plain Dealer yesterday described how more co-eds were asking to live in the dorms this next year because the energy costs of renting a home and the gasoline prices to commute to school by car are so much higher. Sadly, even churches have had to close in the past two years because they no longer

could afford to pay their heating bills. AND maybe the one change in the past two years which hits us hardest is that we are in an economic downturn. Saving dollars through energy conservation when the rising costs of utilities and fuel are pinching our pockets is much easier to promote. No wonder “being green”, conserving resources, and reusing things instead of disposing of them has become the “in” thing. No really it has. It’s a lot easier to be green! Movie stars and rock stars are now environmentalists. Even the little ice show my children were in all through their school days had the theme “Green” this year and theme of the Independence Day Parade next month in the little village where I live is “Being Green”. I mean when the Village of Gates Mills goes green, it means it must be everywhere since it isn’t exactly known for its progressive and forward thinking.

The Scripture passage for this morning is taken from Paul’s letter to the Colossians 1: 15-20. It is one of the lectionary assigned texts for Christ the King Sunday some years and it was one of the suggested texts for Environmental Sermons preached this year. It is considered to be a hymn and much like the Psalm we read as a call to worship this morning was a hymn of God’s praise, this is a hymn in praise of Jesus Christ. Listen now for the word of God.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

The Word of the Lord!

This passage from Colossians is thought to be a hymn that was inserted into the letter to the letter. This hymn of praise to Christ is a hymn describing the Christology of Jesus; that Christ is God and was with God from the beginning of creation. Through Christ creation keeps going and Christ’s reconciliation and peace is what holds the world together. As the children of God, we are tasked with continuing this reconciliation that Jesus Christ began. This means living in harmony with the rest of creation and working

for a fair distribution of the world's resources. It means being concerned for the environment and being mindful of how we treat creation and all things around us that are vulnerable.

So what does this passage have to do with environmental issues? How does it inform us as to our calling to care for Christ's creation? Jesus was with God at creation and calls us to live out the mission of reconciliation that Christ began. This means that we are to live in harmony with creation, with all of God's children and with the environment that surrounds us as well. There is a caring relationship between humans and creation just as there was one between Christ and creation. Being given this charge suggests that we have also been given enough knowledge, understanding, and wisdom to tend the earth and to live with an ethic of responsibility towards it.

So, getting back to what I was talking about at the beginning on this sermon, things have changed in God's creation in the past two years. We know our addiction to fossil fuels must be curbed and weaned or our children and our grandchildren will suffer the consequences of our inaction and greed. Global climate change is fundamentally altering God's creation. Bird and fish migration patterns are changing, the permafrost is melting, and coastal wetlands are disappearing. Global climate change will also bring about an increase in flooding and severe droughts and storms. There is a human toll that needs to be mentioned as well. There will be a reduction in access to drinking water and food and the hardest hit will be to those living in poverty as they depend on their surrounding environment to supply their needs. Areas that will be particularly hardest hit are Africa, Asia, and Latin America. And this is our problem, not theirs as the United States is the largest producer of carbon emissions having 4% of the world's population and producing more than ¼ of the green house gases emitted. We are in a serious crisis but rather than dwell on the potential consequences of following the path we are on, we can emphasize that the story is not finished. The scientists tell us that we have the time to avoid the most devastating impacts of global warming if we begin to act now. The major causes of global climate change are within our control. They come from the emissions from cars, trucks, planes, and buses and the electricity used in our offices and homes.

I don't know how you are doing individually with your personal call to earth-keeping and being a good steward of God and Christ's creation but I have a long way to go. I took several of the tests you which you can find on

the internet that tell you just how large your carbon or ecological footprint is. The website for one is in the bulletin today along with a list from the Sierra Club of ways you can help minimize your carbon footprint. Well, I thought I would do well in these tests as I considered that I was conscious of my role and responsibility to the environment. I mean. I have always recycled and I have even joined the holier-than-thou grocery shoppers who bring our own cloth bags to the store to emphasize reuse and minimize waste. However, on one test I scored 41.63 Global Hectares which of course had no meaning to me. However when I read that the average Global Footprint is 21 Hectares or 50 acres and that to make the earth sustainable we should achieve a footprint of 15 hectares, I knew I had a long way to go. We need to assess our lives, everything and every action we take and weigh the consequences to the environment. To do any different is to be contrary to Christ's call and our role within Christ's body and creation. The Presbyterians for Restoring Creation call us to action stating "As people of faith, we understand our responsibility to protect sacred gifts given by God. In Many ways, global warming represents an unprecedented moral failure on our part as stewards of God's creation and harbingers of justice." Every day is Earth Day to followers of Christ!

So what can we do? First of all we need to realize that God has opened a door for us to do God's work. This call involves all of God's people, not just a selected few. We have known that God calls us into the stewardship of creation since the first time we read Genesis, and this morning's scripture passage from Colossians emphasizes Christ's call and responsibility to creation as well. WE have responsibility to the interconnected eco-systems and to our role within them. We all need to work on our carbon footprints and the foot prints of all that we do. And some of the solutions are so easy. We need to relearn how to eat locally harvested food and food that is in season instead of food that has been shipped in from around the world. We need to drive less, to combine car trips and choose fuel efficient vehicles. We need to change our lighting to energy efficient bulbs and to weather strip our homes so we are not wasting precious energy resources. We also need to support and encourage research and programs aimed at reducing our national dependence on carbon based energy.

We are the very children that creation has been waiting for. We are to promote earth keeping and the abundance of creation. We are to show that as God's, as Christ's, disciples called to justice, love and mercy, one of our tasks is to show the interconnectedness of the environment. Everything we

do and every action we take has a consequence in the environment. And it is easier because we are finally in style. Finally this is our era; this is our time to be at the front of the green movement. Christ is calling us to put our faith into action in saving God's creation. We Christians, who believe in the Christ's dominion over earth and our role in the stewardship of creation, are ahead of the ball here. We have the ethic and the command to be earth-keepers, to be green, to save what God and Christ have created. The Rev Sharon Delgado who is the Executive Director of Earth Justice Ministries in the Methodist church writes, "Each time we install an energy-efficient light bulb, it can be an act of faithfulness. Each time we ride our bike or take a bus, or walk, instead of driving is a spiritual victory. Each time we plant a tree, it is a sign of hope. Each time we struggle to bring the necessary changes to our community, our nation, or our world, we engage in action that can lead to change." We thank God and Jesus Christ for the gift of Creation and for our role in its stewardship; in keeping and sustaining all that has been given to us. Amen.