

Up until I was about 10 or 11 years old I lived on the shores of Lake Texoma. In fact, my family's house was about 300 yards off the shore of a beautiful, picturesque cove full of lush vegetation and diverse wildlife. I spent the early years of my childhood walking down to the lake, fishing and swimming. I would take my pellet gun shoot stuff (sometimes some things I shouldn't be shooting!). I would be a boy. Those were some of my earliest memories.

I don't get to go back to that cove very often, but I did get a chance to about a year ago and I was appalled at what I saw. That beautiful cove is almost completely dried up. The vegetation is dead and the wildlife is virtually gone. Migratory birds used to stop there, now they've moved on to other places. In some areas, I could actually walk across the lake on dry land. All that remains are a few stagnant puddles of water. The ecosystem is completely destroyed.

Now, why do I tell you that story?

Well, this Tuesday is Earth Day. April 22 is always Earth Day, the day in which we celebrate the environment raise awareness about the appreciation of the Earth. Earth Day has been around for almost 40 years. It was started in 1970 by a man named Gaylord Nelson. He was a US Senator from Wisconsin and he wanted to set one day of the year apart for raising awareness about the environment and participating in various kinds of eco-activism. And Earth Day has grown more and more popular since then. It is really popular today because of things like "global warming" and "global climate change," which we'll talk about in a minute.

But I bet you're wondering what in the world our lectionary scripture has to do with Earth Day or the environment. Well, more than you think. *Read 1 Peter 2:9, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."* This verse, in fact this whole passage, describes who Christians are and what Christians are called to do. We are God's people, called out of darkness into marvelous light to proclaim God's action in the world. We are invited to participate in God's work in the world. Our task is to find out what God is up to in the world and discover where and how that is taking place and then to partner with God in realizing God's dream for the world. We are offered grace and then we are invited to respond to that grace, to live into God's life and participate in the divine process of creativity and restoration.

So, what does that look like? What does that process entail? We like to talk about that abstractly a lot in the church, but what does that process look like? What are some tangible, concrete ways that we partner with God and participate in making God's dream a reality? Well, there are a lot of things we talk about. We might talk about evangelism or missions. We might talk about doing justice (Micah 6:8). Since we're Methodists we'd probably talk about "making disciples of Jesus Christ." Personally, I love to talk about Jesus' moral imperative: to love God and love our neighbors. Jesus said that all of the law could be summed up in the one statement. And all of those things are great. We should do those things. But I would submit to you that it also involves caring for God's creation and being good, responsible stewards of our environment. If our definition of what it means to be Christian doesn't involve being environmentally responsible, then I think we are neglecting the gospel. Because frankly, it's pretty hard to love our neighbors, to do justice, or to make disciples if we don't have an earth. We need to expand our definition of who our neighbor is. We need to expand our definition of justice so it includes

eco-justice. We've got to make our planet a priority because it's the only one we've got. We have one shot to get it right. All those other things are important and we should be doing them, but not at the expense of exploiting the earth, because we have to have the earth to live. That seems kind of obvious, but sometimes we tend to forget it.

So, let's go back to where all this started. Let's look at Genesis; specifically Genesis chapter one. Now, I guarantee you if you open up your pew bible to Genesis chapter one, verse one it will say, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," or "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth." That's the usual translation and it implies the creation as already happened. It took place sometime in the past and now it is over. Now, some of you may have a fancy study bible with footnotes and one of those footnotes on this particular verse might say that in the Hebrew—which is the original language the OT was written in—it might read like this, "In the beginning God *began creating* the heavens and the earth." God *began creating*. In the original language this implied that creation wasn't finished. So, perhaps creation is an ongoing, evolutionary process, part of the process in which we are invited to participate with God. It's interesting because more and more as science progresses we are learning that everything is in process, everything is constantly in flux and being re-created. So maybe the ancient poets, and the ancient writers were onto something. If so, this has huge implications for us as God's people, because as you will recall we are made in God's divine image (Gen. 1:27). Each and every one of us bear the mark of the divine upon our being. That means we are co-creators with God, participating in the ongoing process of creation and restoration. We are co-creators with God. That is interesting because many of us live our lives thinking that maybe we're supposed to be co-destinyers with God. At least, that's how we've treated the environment. But we are co-creators with God. And God saw that creation was good. If that is true—I don't think I know anyone who would dispute God's seeing creation as good—then we have a divine responsibility to see to it that God's creation stays good. We have a divine mandate to care for the earth and to care for creation.

Now, this all may seem pretty obvious, but for many years we've lived under the assumption that creation just doesn't matter much. And ironically, that thinking comes from Genesis also, Genesis one in fact! But it is a misinterpretation. Genesis chapter one verse twenty-eight, right after God creates humankind in God's image, right after that in your pew bible it will say this, "*Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.*" There's some interesting language there. Words like "subdue" and "dominion." We've latched onto those words and we've let them define our ethos in relation to the environment. We've interpreted that to mean that we are the ultimate rulers of creation and that anything in creation only exists to serve our purpose. Creation has no intrinsic value only utilitarian value in relation to us. It's only there for us to use and to use up. And as a result of that type of thinking we've abused our power and we've treat the world like an endless resource and an endless garbage dump. And it is neither. The world may have resources, but they are not endless, we're learning more and more than they have limits and we are stretching those limits.

What's interesting is that this whole line of thinking stems from those two words in Genesis: "dominion" and "subdue." And guess what? They are bad translations! A better translation of those words would be something like "responsible stewardship." As persons made in the image

of God we are to use power like God uses power, we are supposed to be co-creators like God is a creator and we supposed to be responsible stewards like God is a responsible stewards. God saw that creation was good. I don't think there's a one of us that think that God abuses power or exploits creation. Perhaps the question we need to ask is, then why are we? If we are to be responsible stewards then why are we destroying the earth?

Now, when I say stewardship in a Methodist church I guarantee you that most everyone thinks of money. But stewardship is not just about money. In fact, stewardship originally wasn't about money. According to Genesis original stewardship is about caring for the earth. The first responsibility we are given as human beings is to be responsible stewards of creation. So, I think we need a new type of stewardship campaign. One that has nothing to do with money. In fact, one that has to do with spending less money, consuming less stuff, being better stewards of what we have and seeing to it that God's creation remains a good creation. One that acknowledges that problem we have with climate change and one that works toward mitigation not just adaptation. That is to say we need to work more at lessening our effects on the earth and the environment rather than trying to lessen the earth's effect on us. We need to change our lifestyles. And that takes sacrifice. It's going to take a lot of sacrifice and I'm not sure we completely understand that. The other day I took this assessment that determined my eco-footprint, which basically means it told me how much I'm contributing to the problem and how much of the resources I'm using up. Guess what I found out? If everyone in the world lived like I do it would take 2.1 planets, 2.1 earths to sustain everyone lifestyle. 2.1. And apparently that is lower than the average US citizens. On average if everyone in world lived like we do in the United States it would take it would take 4.8 planets. 4.8! We do we get that audacity to think that we deserve the luxury to live extravagantly at the rest of the world's expense? That, is very, very unchristian.

Now, I want to say a few things about science and climate change real quick. Now, to some of us, the science doesn't matter much, but to some of us it is compelling so I'll mention a few things. First, we know that climate change is happening and we know that largely humans are the main cause. That is virtually undisputed now. Now, the reality of climate change has always been controversial and political but the consensus of the scientific community is overwhelmingly clear. Given the news and given our politics that may seems surprising, but a few years ago a study was released and it found that among that hundreds and hundreds of articles published in the peer-reviewed scientific community zero disputed the fact the climate change is happening and that human beings are largely the cause. However, among the news media and other non-peer-reviewed outlets over 65% of the publications questioned the existence of climate change and most refuted that fact that humans are the main cause. So, you can see why it is confusing. Because we have the experts saying one thing and everyone else saying another.

Anytime there is a breakthrough and something questions the status quo and especially when it calls for us to drastically change our thinking and our lifestyle, it is meant with politicized controversy. When Galileo first came out and said that the earth wasn't the center of our solar system and that everything revolved around the sun, he was met with overwhelming opposition. In fact, he was excommunicated from the church! It turns out Galileo was right. We have the same sort of thing going on now. And that should be expected. We should expect it to be controversial, but as Christians we should be leading the way. We should be the ones to step and

advocate for a more sustainable way of living, to use less stuff and to use what we have more efficiently. That is part of what it means to love our global neighbor. We must change. Our thinking must change. Our consciousness must change. Our politics must change. Because we are Christians, everything must change. If it doesn't we may not be leaving our kids and our grandkids much of a planet.

Since the industrial revolution our way of life has changed dramatically. The advancements in our technology, in our medicine, and in our science have changed our lives. But our thinking hasn't changed. And if we plan to take care of the earth our thinking must change. For the first time in history now we are worrying about destroying the planet instead of it destroying us. Think about that. Up until the last 100 years or so people have always worried about the planet destroying them and now all the sudden that the tables have turned we have to worry about destroying the planet. Or at least we should be worried because if we don't change our thinking then the silence of our action will destroy our environment and in 75-100 years no one will be able to live on planet earth.

For example, you've heard of the polar ice cap? Our maps will likely have to be re-written soon because the ice on the polar ice caps and the ice in places like Greenland and Antarctica is melting very, *very* quickly. From 1979-2000 the ice of the polar caps remained fairly stable. Some would melt in the summer and refreeze in the winter. The cycle was uninterrupted. In 2005, more ice melted, not enough to really change anything, but more than normal. Then, in the summer of last year alone, in the summer of 2007, over 1/3 of the ice melted. Over 1/3! Now some of it re-froze this winter, the ice that refreezes is not permanent ice. It is vulnerable ice that will melt this summer along with more than last time. So, in the next 20 or so years, there may not be a polar ice cap. And that causes a problem, because most of the ice is above the ocean surface so when it melts the ocean level rises. Projections estimate that if the polar ice caps melt completely ocean levels will rise 25 feet worldwide. That makes it very tough for people living at or below sea level. That creates a lot of displaced people. Not to mention the fact that it disrupts ecosystems and disrupts the ocean current system. The United States is the leading country in carbon emissions per capita, and with the exception of China it emits more carbon each year than every other country combined. The United States is also the only developed nation that refuses to ratify the Kyoto protocol and work towards limiting carbon emissions which isn't much of a surprise when you see how much money we make from the oil and gas industry and how utterly dependent we are on fossil fuels for energy. The sad part of it all is that in the United States we are the leading cause of the problem, but we don't see most of the effects. Most of the effects go to the world's poor, mainly people in sub-Saharan Africa. We use up the resources and cause the climate problems and we let them bear the brunt of the effects. They don't get the resources and because they are close to the equator climate change affects them the most. Extreme weather and things. That, my friends is immoral. Things must change. We need a shift in our consciousness and as Christians, we should be leading the way.

I could go on and mention more things like extinction, extreme weather changes, forest fires, strip mining and things. I heard just this week that the salmon industry on the west coast is shutting down mid-season because the salmon population is on the very edge of disappearing. I could mention more depressing things, but I won't. Because the truth is, as Christians when you get right down to it, the science shouldn't matter to us. Yes, it is important and it is compelling, it

shows exactly what the problem is and how big it is. But we shouldn't be waiting until there is a problem to take action. We should be acting regardless of the problem because it is our mandate from God, it is our divine responsibility as Christians to make sure that God's creation remains a good creation. So, whatever your thoughts are about climate change and the science and the politics surrounding it know this: as people who claim to be Christians we are called to live differently in the world, to be co-creators with God and to be responsible stewards of the world in which we live. Even if climate change wasn't happening, even if there wasn't a looming problem, as people who God we should still be caring for the earth and we should still be doing things like reducing our carbon emissions and living a more sustainable lifestyle because we know that that makes God's world a better place. Of course because we know there is problem we work all the more fervently. We don't wait for there to be a problem to take action, we act anyway because we believe in a different type of world. We don't wait for our government to tell us what to do, we do something anyway because our loyalty lies with God not our country.

So, what can we actually do? What are some concrete, tangible things that we can do? Well, there are lots of things. We can recycle what we use, we can carpool more often because that not only uses less gas, but it also builds relationships. We can avoid using things like Styrofoam as much as possible. We can use energy efficient light bulbs and we can be more energy efficient in general by turning off lights when we're not using them and unplugging things that use power when we're not using them. We can use less stuff and use what we do have more efficiently. We can be better stewards of our stuff. It's become really trendy these days to "Go Green." That's become the new things to do. So you buy t-shirts that say you're going green or you buy other stuff to show that you're going green. And that's fine. But we need to understand, especially as Americans, that we can't buy ourselves out of every problem. The answer to the climate crisis is not consuming more stuff it consuming less, using less stuff and using what you have and appreciating what you have. We don't need to buy more things so show that we're going green we need to use less and consume less. All of these things matter. All of these things are *very* important. And all of these things are *deeply* Christian because they help ensure that God's creation stays a good creation. And that is our responsibility, if we, the people of God cannot address this issue, then how can we expect others to? We need to move beyond the politics of all this. We need to move beyond the politicization and the division and understand that as Christians that doesn't really matter, we transcend that because we are citizens of the kingdom of God who happen to live in a geographical area that happens to be called the United States. And because of that citizenship we have a divine responsibility and a divine mandate to care for the earth, to be co-creators with God and responsible stewards of creation in the same way that God is, to participate in the divine process of creativity and restoration, to respond to God's grace and live into God's life, and to realize that what we do and how we live in this world matters it has deep implications.

This is a group in Philadelphia called New Jerusalem. It is a recovery group for persons who are dealing with addiction and substance abuse. Around 50 people live in the community and most of them are virtually homeless and jobless. Until Pentecost Sunday we're still celebrating Easter and the resurrection, part of the mission statement of this community is to practice resurrection, to live and be resurrection in the world, so that when people ask the question did Jesus rise from the dead, they can look at the lives of these people and say absolutely. In the building where this community lives there is a sign that says, "We cannot fully recover until we help the society that

made us sick recover.” That’s powerful. Now in Philadelphia because of the economy and other things around 200,000 jobs have been lost. So, these people have to get creative with making a living. And of the things they’ve done is absolutely wonderful. They call it a practicing resurrection project. And what it is is a grease co-op. They collect as much grease as they can from around the city, from restaurants and things and they convert it into bio-diesel. So now in Philadelphia there are cars running off of homemade biodiesel, that aren’t polluting the environment with gas and oil. They’ve created jobs for people and they are participating in God’s process of creativity and restoration. They are making sure that God’s creation remains a good creation. They have people who ask them: Why do you make biodiesel and why do you have cars that run off of biofuels? And you know what they? They say, “We do this because we are Christians.” We do this because we are Christians.

And so, may you come to see that caring for the earth and caring for creation is *deeply* Christian and it has deep implication for our children and our grand children’s future. May you come to see that we have a divine mandate and a divine responsibility to make sure that God’s good creation remains a good creation. May you become even better responsible stewards of what you have and may partner and participate with God has co-creators in God’s divine conspiracy, God’s divine process of restoration and renewal. And when people ask you why you do it, may you be a faithful witness and say “Because I am a Christian.”

In the name of the One who created you, the One who is redeeming you, and the One who sustains you now and forevermore. Amen.