

# Green Living

## Creation Care Sunday, June 2, 2019

Genesis 1

Covenant Presbyterian Church, Madison WI

Rev. Charlie Berthoud

Today is Creation Care Sunday at Covenant, a Sunday to celebrate God's creation. This time of year, we're surrounded by green trees, green plants, green grass, so it's a good time to think about green living and our calling as Christians.

Our reading today comes from Genesis, the first book of the Bible. It's the first of two creation accounts in Genesis—the first being more general more cosmic, the second being more specific, with Adam and Eve.

I'm going to read excerpts from Genesis 1, and even in the excerpts you'll notice that the text tells us that God essentially speaks the world into existence with God's words. God's word makes creation happen.

Not coincidentally, the author of the gospel according to John begins that gospel with "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." God's word is powerful.

As I read excerpts from Genesis 1, I invite you to look at the image of this massive stained-glass window at the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection.

You can see the Genesis account of creation on the left. Jesus is in the garden in the center. And the vision of the new creation, with the tree of life and the river of life on the right. This window reminds us that the whole Bible and by implication our faith is nestled in God's creation.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup> the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup> Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. <sup>4</sup> And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup> God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

<sup>9</sup> And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. <sup>10</sup> God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. <sup>11</sup> Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And God saw that it was good.

<sup>20</sup> And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky. Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>26</sup> Then God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them, and God said to them, “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.” <sup>31</sup> God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

Thanks be to God for Scripture and the goodness of creation. Amen.

One of the many good and delightful creatures of the world is the Cuvier’s Beaked Whale. Like countless other creatures, it’s beautiful and fascinating.

I had never heard of this type of whale until a few weeks ago, when reports from the Philippines told of a juvenile Cuvier Beaked Whale washing ashore, dead.



Researchers discovered 88 pounds of plastic in the whale’s stomach. 88 pounds! The whale weighed about 1,100 pounds so that’s about 8% of its body weight.

A whale choking to death on plastic is an all too real example of how we are not doing a good job of caring for creation.

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/03/whale-dies-88-pounds-plastic-philippines/>

Another example of the problems of creation care is the continued surge in extreme weather: hurricanes, floods, polar vortexes and tornados. Just last week, there were tornadoes in suburban Philadelphia.

The extremes in weather are coming, in part from climate change, which is becoming more of a problem each year. Gradually we are recognizing our role. I read this week on NASA.gov

Multiple studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals show that 97 percent or more of actively publishing climate scientists agree: Climate-warming trends over the past century are extremely likely due to human activities. <https://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus/>

But for a variety of reasons, we have failed to act on what the scientists tell us, so sadly we live in a time when people feel the need to have “Science is Real” signs on their lawns.



The bad news about creation is sadly all around us.

But we are people of Good News—which we need to proclaim, share, and live.

Jesus began his ministry proclaiming Good News—the Good News of the kingdom of God, a new reality of love, justice, and righteousness.

Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” (Mark 1:14-15)

Jesus taught us to pray about this Kingdom:

“thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven.”

This Kingdom, this new reality is meant to be right here, right now, on this earth.

As his followers, as Christians, we’re called to live into this new reality. As Presbyterians, we look not only to Scripture but also to our Book of Order, for guidance on how to live into this new reality.

The “Ministry of Members” section of the BOO calls us to be:

- proclaiming the good news in word and deed,
- taking part in the common life and worship of a congregation,
- lifting one another up in prayer, mutual concern, and active support,
- studying Scripture and the issues of Christian faith and life,
- working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment,

And at the most recent General Assembly, we added one more item to the list:

caring for God's creation

So there it is, in our Constitution: as members, as Christians we are called to care for God's creation. It's part of our job description.

This call to care for creation comes from Scripture. If we had more time I could share dozens of verses, but for now, just this:

God so loved the world.... (John 3:16)

It's one of the best-known scriptures affirms God's love.

As we welcome that love, we're called to share it. When Jesus was asked which commandment was the greatest, he replied: Love God and love neighbor (Matthew 22: 37-39).

Love is at the core of our faith.

Author and pastor Brian McLaren affirms that if we're going to love our neighbors, we have to love and care for creation.

If you love your neighbor as yourself, you want both them and you to be able to breathe, so you need to love clean fresh air. If you love your neighbor as yourself, you want them and you to be able to drink, so you need to love pure water in all its forms. If you love your neighbor as yourself, you want them and you to be able to eat, so you need to care about the climate and about soil and about fisheries, fields, farms, and forests.

If you love your neighbor as yourself, you will want all your children and your future descendants to be able to enjoy the beauty of creation too, so you will care about conservation and you will see ecology as a beautiful and holy science.

--Brian McLaren in *The Great Spiritual Migration*, p. 60

He invites us to ponder: what kind of world are we giving our children and grandchildren? What kind of world are we giving future generations?

I want to close with gratitude for two people in the previous generation: my parents.



My Dad taught me to appreciate birds and just being outside. He went on bird-walks and we had birdfeeders at home. From an early age, I could identify birds with names that made my friends laugh: like a black-capped chickadee or a tufted titmouse. To this day, I love looking at birds.

And my Mom was a recycler, way back in the 1970s before it was trendy or easy to do. We collected glass bottles and jars—and there were a lot more before the onslaught of plastics—and drove about 15 minutes to the recycling site, where me and my brothers got to do the awesome task of throwing the glass into a big dumpster.

My mom was a genius—letting us break glass while teaching us about recycling.

My parents gave me the gift appreciating creation and of caring for creation. We all have people who have taught us these things. Are we listening?

God continues to speak to us

Through the beauty of creation

Through the Scriptures

Through each other

God speaks to us, calling us to

Love our neighbors

Be good stewards of creation

Are we listening?

Let us pray.