

SERMON UNIVERSITY CHAPEL SUNDAY, Jan. 17 2016.
STEWARDSHIP.
(2nd Sunday after Epiphany)

Topic: *Stewardship of the Environment*

Text: 1 Cor.: 12: 1 -11

Introduction:

Last week we looked at the subject of Stewardship – its meaning and what God expects of us. This week let us look at Stewardship and our responsibility as it relates to the Environment.

We just sang the hymn written by Isaac Watts. Let's look at the words again # 649 CPWI Hymnal – *"I Sing the Almighty Power of God"*. This Hymn extols the power, wisdom, and goodness of God as seen in the created order. It recognizes that it is God who has made all these beautiful wonders; and that it is this great God who created this vast universe, loves us and keeps the world in order and us through His ever-present care.

Let us pray:

Father, we rejoice in the living world;
We are surprised every day by its beauty,
its complexity, its mystery.

May we respect the world of nature,
knowing that it is your good creation.
Lift up our hearts as we lift up our eyes
to clouds, stars, rain, leaves, birds,
and let us live in thankfulness.

May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer. Amen.

Environmental Christian Stewardship:

Christian Stewardship as it relates to the environment is not a new concept. We read in the Book of Genesis that God made the heavens and the earth and everything in it and that God gave human beings dominion over everything. Dominion does not mean that we should abuse this position of power with which God has endowed us, but that we should preserve and protect the environment.

The theologian John Calvin interpreted man's dominion over the earth to mean "a responsible care and keeping that does not neglect, injure, abuse, degrade, dissipate, corrupt, mar, or ruin the earth."

Christians are guided by the inspired word of God and should view our actions as good stewards as part of our service to the larger Will and Purposes of God, our Creator. We can therefore say that we are responsible to God to care for God's creation. This is fundamentally why we exist. Yes, to love God and to worship God forever.

But how did human beings fall out of sync with God's plan as it relates to the environment to the extent that the very existence of our planet is now threatened?

Global warming is recognized worldwide as a man-made phenomenon which is disrupting the balance of the environment leading to extreme weather, endangerment of certain species of flora and fauna and many other challenges.

Climate change affects humanity, the environment, and the creatures of the earth. Carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and fluorocarbons are all green house gases that have increased over the last hundred years due to human inventions.

When God created the heavens and the earth, God deemed it "good". God created land, water, plants, animals and humans and all worked together in a perfect ecosystem.

However, because of the fall of man, this perfect harmony was disrupted. There began to develop a struggle between man and the land. Gen. 3: 17-19 tells us that due to the curse of sin, Adam was forced to toil with the earth. Sin also invaded the minds of human beings who began to develop negative traits of greed, carelessness in dealing with the land, causing overuse and unneeded destruction. However, we are heartened by the good news that through Christ, God has redeemed those who trust in Jesus.

The vision of God for creation is compromised when there is injustice. There is a close correlation between the ways people exploit the earth and the ways people exploit the poor. Jer. 2: 7 says: ***“I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce, but you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable.”*** (This requires just a moment to reflect on what God’s prophet Jeremiah says).

Again, we read in Isaiah 24:4-7, the lament of God that humans have defiled and destroyed the earth by disobeying the laws and violating the statutes. The verses tell us: “The earth dries up and withers; the whole world grows weak; both earth and sky decay. The people have defiled the earth by breaking God’s laws and by violating the covenant he made to last forever. So God has pronounced a curse on the earth. Its people are paying for what they have done. Fewer and fewer remain alive. The grapevines wither, and wine is becoming scarce. Everyone one who was once happy is now sad.”

Nevertheless, God gives a very enlightened view of the earth and what God desires of us in Leviticus 25. God first tells the people to observe a "Land Sabbath" every seventh year in which the land was not to be cultivated. The stated purpose of this was a "rest for the land" and a "Sabbath to the Lord" (Leviticus 25:4).

Does this practice sound familiar? Speak with any Agronomist, and he/she will tell you that resting the land is an important part of soil preservation.

Psalm 19:3-4 in describing the heavens, says this: *They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth.*

This text focuses on creation and how it is a great testimony to the glory of God. Yet humanity exploits nature and the environment for our own gain. In Genesis 2:15, God gives specific orders for us to be good stewards of the gift of creation. However, humanity seems determined to constantly take from nature and not give much in return. The earth cannot be sustained in this way. It is as if humanity is trying to silence the voice of nature.

Nature testifies to God's power; the sun shines and the rain falls on the just and unjust alike (Matt. 5:45). It treats everyone equally, poor or rich, powerless or powerful. May we be as nature, declaring the works of God by treating each other fairly and equally.

While God did indeed tell us to "till and keep" the earth, it is clear that this was only in the capacity of stewards. We are not owners, just mere stewards.

So why are countries fighting each other over the world's resources. Countries are dividing up the Lord's creation and taking onto themselves territories, some even far from their own country. So China is building an island in the South China Sea and taking ownership of it, Britain claims ownership of the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas) – a territory some 12,978 km from its own borders. Fisher folk have to be careful or they find themselves in trouble for straying into the territorial waters of other countries. Just recently, the USA found itself in a bit of a pickle as two of their military vessels strayed into Iranian waters. Luckily things

ended well on that occasion. Fly over another country's air space without permission and you are shot down.

We human beings must recognize that everything belongs to God. (Psalm 24) We have ownership of nothing, ourselves – we are just caretakers of God's creation.

Christ, as the Purpose of Creation

God placed much value on the earth through the Old Testament. It is clear that all created things were made "through" and "for" Christ. We should be careful not to usurp Christ's position, thinking that the earth and its creatures were created solely for our benefit. Christ was both the conduit for creation and the purpose of it. It can be said that Christ brought perfection and beauty to creation.

Christ's mission to redeem us from sin is also directed toward the earth itself. When humankind, who was created from the earth itself, sinned, we brought a curse to the earth: Gen. 3:17 says, ***Cursed is the ground because of you.*** Christ's power to specifically forgive sins "on earth" (Luke 5:24) points to his mission of "reconciling all things, whether on earth or in heaven" to God through His death. (Colossians 1:20).

While we automatically think on what Christ's death means to us personally, the redemption of the entire creation is explicit in His mission: *This is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me* (John 6:39). This includes ***everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him*** (John 6:40), as well as the entirety of creation which was created "through" and "for" Christ. John 3:16 points to the purpose for Christ's coming into the world. ***For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believes in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.***

The word ***world*** comes from the Greek word ***kosmos*** which means "encompassing the universe and all created things". It signifies Christ's mission to redeem all creation from the effects of sin.

Conclusion

Christian environmental stewardship is derived from the biblical record of God's created order. Gen. 2:15 records the basis for this stewardship. It is based in God's instructions to Adam to use and care for the natural world that God gave him. While sin has since corrupted man and nature, causing greed, torment, and improper viewpoints toward the environment, the spiritual and physical perfection of the Garden of Eden will eventually be realized because of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, Christians should look forward to the day in which the physical will no longer groan to be returned to its originally designed state and predicate our actions upon such a promise. We should properly use and care for God's creation as good stewards of what God created and what God has given us. This proper viewpoint provides worship and respect to the Creator, humbling humankind under the authority of God and the saving work of Jesus Christ.

On this the 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany, it is a good opportunity for us to examine our own gifts in respect of how we can use them to become good environmental stewards for our Creator.

Our Lessons for today pose this question for our reflection and action. The question is: **What concern is that to me?**

Isaiah 62: 1-5. How can we apply Isaiah's message to our lives when looking for an answer to the question just raised? The task is clearly by the passage. "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent... I will not rest." The messenger bears good news of jubilation, news of vindication, and salvation.

Commentator Jane Marie Thibault states that: “Our mandate is to spend our lives as co-workers with God for the redemption of the world. In gospel terms we are called to work each day for God’s reign to come, God’s will to be done – on earth as in heaven. Our destiny finds fulfillment in the marriage of the Creator and the created. God delights in this union and proposes to us as individuals. When we accept this proposal we – we in union with God and others – work to make our planet a place of peace, harmony, and love. It becomes the “kin-dom” where God and God’s people live, love, work, and play side by side and rest together at the close of the day.”

In 1 Cor. 12: 1-11 Paul speaks to the Church in Corinth telling them that all the various talents present in the church are the work of one and the same Spirit who distributes them to each one just as he determines.

“Your spiritual gift occurs where your human passion and God’s desires for the world meet.”

Jane tells us that: “This spiritual counsel presents three criteria for discerning a spiritual gift. 1) It is a gift, not a skill or an innate talent; 2) It is a form of service for the good of God’s children; 3) It demonstrates that it is God who desires and accomplishes the work.

God, in his wisdom has endowed each of us with various gifts; let us resolve to use them for the preservation of our environment.

Our prayer at this point should be: **Dear God, help me discern my spiritual gift(s). May I use them to the fullest.**

We human beings who are made in the image and likeness of God are considered to be the apex of God’s creation, set apart from the other ani-

mals by our ability to think, rationalize and exercise judgment. How do we see our role as stewards of the environment? Do you and I unwittingly contribute to its degradation?

The environment is being destroyed because of human selfishness. Someone remarked that: “We live in a world of “selfies”. Everything is about “me”.

Phil. 2:4 tells us: “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interest of others”.

Read the gospel lesson **John 2: 1-11**

Jesus—as obedient Son—responds to Mary’s suggestion that he help with the wine situation, and the Gospel writer tells us that by doing so he “revealed the glory.” What glory did he reveal? That he had supernatural powers? That his humility brought obedience despite it not being the right time? What does he teach us about God’s realm through his actions?

Let me encourage and challenge you this morning as God’s faithful and obedient stewards to stand up, speak out, take action and be counted; call for a better world; and use your gifts of time, talents and resources to work in partnership with God for the restoration of the environment.

Let Us Pray:

Lord, we thank you for creating the world and for making us, humans, in your own image and likeness. By so doing, you have made us caretakers of your creation. We thank you that we can recognize your awesome power through the marvel of the earth and the universe. We know that we are part of a greater whole, and that we have a duty to care for the

earth by conserving and nurturing the things around us. Give us the strength and courage to act in concert, rather than conflict with the environment as we recognize that yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.