

# *Sermon Text for March 8, 2015*

*by*

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Romans 1:18-21, Genesis 1:6-19

“Mother Earth”

And you thought this Sunday was just going to be another normal Sunday where we got everything back in the pews and on the walls. I do need to tell you the vast majority of the feedback that I got was that last week was nice, it was peaceful. We often have an image of creation as this boil of stew and noise and confusion, as opposed to a God peacefully but with anticipation looking to see what He might be able to do and chomping at the bit to do it.

Today we are going on a dizzying journey through three days of creation. We will find ourselves looking at the created earth and the environment around us. We will ask ourselves the question what are our responsibilities toward this earth that we call home.

## **READ**

Ephesians 6 video:

A challenge that we have as pastors every week is to find something that Scripture addresses very specifically that has a direct impact upon our daily lives. West Wing speaks to the temptation of regurgitating the tired old passages and the same messages that have repeated for centuries that don't really address the Scripture directly. I like to take a Scripture and discover where what it says speaks to us, as opposed to taking a topic and trying to find Scripture to back up what I want the congregation to hear. This week, the topic comes jumping out of the Scripture without even a need to try very hard to understand where Scripture is going here. The intersection of this Scripture without daily lives is pretty self-evident.

Every year when Stacy and I were in Italy we would take the orphanage kids on a Chestnut Hunt. We would leave the busy, congested, cement jungle called the city and take the bus out to the forest, away from the smog and the pollution and find chestnuts on a hillside. These were city kids and they had never really been out in the natural beauty of the earth. They loved getting out into the country. But it was also a time of learning

for them. They had to learn, and we had to teach them, how to behave and respect the nature around them.

They had to learn that it was not OK to throw their lunch bags on the ground. They saw trash around them because everyone else did it. They had to learn not to break the branches off the trees. They had no respect and appreciate nature because they had had no exposure, certainly very little exposure, while they were living in the city. We had to teach them that nature was a gift from God, to them. Since they received so few gifts in their lives they learned to cherish and protect any they received. Often if they received something nice from home over the weekend they would hide it so that no one would steal it, because they wanted to keep it. They could understand cherishing a gift and so cherishing the earth as God's gift was a logical step for them.

Our Scripture today in Genesis takes us through day four of the creation account. Each day it is God who speaks, God who directs, God who gives his blessing by saying it is good. We find the earth being lifted up out of the waters and thus being created. It is amazing to truly understand the Biblical account. The Hebrew people considered the seas and waters as chaos and evil. Once again we find God creating something good, something beautiful, what we call earth out of the chaos and the evil. In essence we find God creating the earth which is eventually put before humanity as a gift from God.

Genesis portrays this whole creation account as a preparation of the earth to be presented to humanity for their home. Everything had to be just right before we were made and allowed to inhabit this earth. Even the stars and the sun and the moon were put in so that we could have celestial time keepers for our seasons and times. God even put into place daylight savings time so that the lights could take a break. The plants were also in place for us. Later in Genesis we find that they are considered the meat for us to eat at the banquet table. We find ourselves at the end of day four with the earth completely prepared for us and ready for us to move in.

Let's look at this earth, this gift from God and try to understand what our responsibilities are for the earth. The title of the sermon today is Mother Earth. This metaphor comes from a pagan ritualistic background. In ancient times some religions worshipped the earth as a mother because of its fertility, protection, and basically because the earth was an easy thing to worship because it was all around us. This type of worship

has carried on even to today within new age and other groups who see the earth as a living being, an entity unto itself, having its own character, even its own soul.

What we find in Scripture is something drastically different. The earth from the beginning is considered one of God's many creations. It is considered a home for humanity. It is considered a gift that is given to us. It is not a living being. There is a stark difference between mother earth the creator and mother earth the created. Sure enough Adam was taken from the earth and created but here the earth is nothing more than the raw material used by the creator God. Even today we continue that understanding in our funeral services when we say earth to earth and ashes to ashes. This is the difference and the distinction between the earth in the Genesis account and the earth in modern culture account.

We need to be very careful not to be skewed by considering the earth a living being that needs to be protected by us. Or earth as containing the essence or the presence of God. That is not our theological understanding. But...and this is where our responsibility lies, the earth is a gift created by God, given to us. Like all of God's gifts, but even more so, we need to recognize our responsibilities before God to take care of this gift. The earth has been prepared by God as our home, it provides the food, the seasons. God meticulously planned and created so that we would be able to have the earth the way it was created.

Not only is the earth a gift from God and as such needs to be treated with due respect, but it is also, as our First Scripture states, a witness to God. One of the most powerful experiences of God's presence was when I was in Maine once, it was late at night and I was in a canoe. I was in the middle of nowhere, listening to Indigo Girls which is a spiritual experience all unto itself, but all of a sudden I saw lights flickering across the water. I looked up and saw the sky putting on a show of lights that was absolutely breathtaking. I lived a sheltered life so I had never heard of the Northern lights before. I thought God was doing this just for me. It was a Father filled, Jesus inspired, Spirit happening. We have all had times that we have nearly been overcome by the beauty of nature.

This is what Romans is talking about. Of course salvation only comes through Jesus Christ. The earth, nature, serves as a witness to the Creator God and can lead

people to Christ without a word. Romans tells us that there is not a soul who has an excuse to not believe in God because all have the ability to see nature. Nature reflects, according to Romans, the presence of God.

Genesis has given us the fact that God has created, it has given us the fact that the earth upon which we stand and have our being is a gift from God specifically prepared for us. This means, though, that we do have certain responsibilities to our creator God for this wonderful gift. We can't like children at Christmas time throw away the gift and use the box for a toy. We do that so often with our earth. We try to find the artificial trimmings that in the long run destroy the ultimate gift.

As Christians our primary role on this earth is to spread the good news of the Gospel so that others will be attracted to Jesus. But what happens if we can't lead by example? Our message will sound hollow. As Christians we seem to have very strong and defined beliefs and judgments on moral, individual personal issues. Ask us about any of the sexual issues such as adultery, even issues such as abortion. Any of the personal moral concerns create a strong urge in us to speak out.

But when it comes to issues that affect the community as a whole such as our topic for today, the environment, we are much more silent. At least we have in the case of adultery clear words on that and also the remnants of societal support that adultery is wrong. In the long run you can speak out against it because it will never affect you, you think.

We decry the hypocrisy of our church because our monies go to support certain things that we disagree with. But we still pay our taxes even if the government is completely opposed to what we stand for. We speak out against our government, that's fine, but do we run to Canada and leave our country. No, because it is still the best that we know and it still addresses the fundamental issues that are crucial in our relationship to Jesus.

But the difference is with issues such as the respect for the environment is that it affects all of us. Since it affects us and demands an immediate change or introspection on our part, well then that is too close to home. Plus there is no real tangible way to judge the effects of pollution or to see the immediate results of our inattention to the earth

God has given us. We put our trash on the curb, someone is nice enough to pick it up for us, and we forget about it.

We are silent about the environment and this one touches very close to home because we are all guilty. There is not a single person here who is not guilty of abusing the gift that God has given us that is called earth. You see we are guilty of abusing God's gift but we are silent because it affects all of our livelihood. We would risk too much if we were to change or even more speak up. We couldn't drive the cars that we are now driving. We would have to live a lifestyle much closer to the Amish than to one as Presbyterian if we wanted to not be hypocrites when it comes to taking care of God's earth.

It's risky being a Christian, or at least it should be. The earth is too precious a gift from our creator to disregard it or even worse to treat it as a worthless possession. No the earth is not a living being, no it is not an entity unto itself, yes God did give us charge of the earth. But as God gives us charge of our children whom we wouldn't even dream of abusing, then how would we and why do we not view God's gift of our home the planet in the same way?

The earth is God's gift and we are sinning just as much when we pollute it as if we are involved in any personal immoral action. Let us respect God's gift of this earth. Amen.