



Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace

The Power and Promise of Peace

LENTEN FAST – WEEK TWO

FASTING FROM VIOLENCE AGAINST CREATION

**The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof,
the world and those who dwell therein;
for God has founded it upon the seas,
and established it upon the rivers. (Psalm 24:1)**

The Earth's climate is warming to dangerous levels; 90 percent of the world's fisheries have been depleted; coastal development and pollution are causing a sharp decline in ocean health; shrinking habitat threatens to extinguish thousands of species; over 95 percent of the contiguous U.S. forests have been lost; and almost half of the population in the U.S. live in areas that do not meet national air quality standards.

Scriptural Reflections

Our mandate [to care for God's creation is from biblical scripture. First, we read in Genesis that God beholds all creation as "very good" (Gen 1:31) and commands us to "till and tend the garden" (Gen 2:15). Humankind is called to stewardship of the commons. Second, we read in Psalms, "The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Ps 24:1). The bounty of creation's gifts must serve the common good of all. Third, we have a paramount obligation to "defend the poor and the orphan; do justice to the afflicted" (Ps 82:3) and to care first for "the least of these" (Math 25:35). Care for God's creation particularly requires protection of vulnerable life. Finally, we have an obligation, in prudence and precaution, to sustain the future well-being of all life on Earth, God's "covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature for perpetual generations" (Gen 9:12).

The values underlying our concerns are shared by more and more religious Americans whose faith groups have been increasingly active in programs to care for God's creation. We encourage all to study, pray, convene, and consider courses of action. We share these perspectives with great respect for colleagues in faith communities with many theological traditions and cultural perspectives. There will be no single approach to these challenges. But religious Americans everywhere increasingly recognize an overarching obligation for faithfulness in caring for God's creation. Moreover, we are discovering that care for God's creation renews religious life itself. And so we are all called to consider an ancient challenge under fresh circumstances across the entire planet, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live." (Deut 30:19)

Denominational Statements

The Church of the Brethren

Caring for God's creation takes on more urgency with each passing day. The climate continues to warm, half of all the earth's wetlands are already gone, we're losing an average of one species of plant or animal to extinction every hour, and all the while Americans are consuming their weight in stuff every day.

The Episcopal Church

Affirming our responsibility for the earth in trust for this and future generations, we declare that Christian Stewardship of God's created environment, in harmony with our respect for human dignity, requires response from the Church of the highest urgency. We call on all citizens of the world to live their lives as good stewards with responsible concern for the sustainability of the environment and with appreciation for the global interdependence of human life and the natural worlds. We urge all to reflect on their personal and corporate habits in the use of God's creation; to share with one another ideas for new responses; and to act as individuals, congregations, dioceses, and provinces of the Episcopal Church in ways that protect and heal all interdependent parts of creation. Such action should include prayerful theological discernment and factual knowledge. It should also consider global and local links and the balance of environmental integrity with economic sufficiency for human living. The Episcopal Church, acknowledging the sovereignty of God and God's call to us in the servanthood of Christ, continue to engage environmental issues, passionately caring for the earth and striving to live into the promises and mandates which are ours as stewards of creation.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America

The earth is a planet of beauty and abundance; the earth system is wonderfully intricate and incredibly complex. But today living creatures, and the air, soil, and water that support them, face unprecedented threats. Many threats are global; most stem directly from human activity. Our current practices may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner we know. We see the despoiling of the environment as nothing less than the degradation of God's gracious gift of creation. Humans, in service to God, have special roles on behalf of the whole of creation. Made in the image of God, we are called to care for the earth as God cares for the earth...Given the power of sin and evil in this world, as well as the complexity of environmental problems, we know we can find no "quick fix" – whether technological, economic, or spiritual. A sustainable environment requires a sustained effort from everyone. As people of faith, captives of hope, and vehicles of God's promise, we face the crisis.

The United Church of Christ

Faithful persons are called to affirm the good of creation and to work for its continuing life and renewal. Such action is not merely living faithfully, but also showing gratitude for the gifts of God. The call to faith is a call to be faithful as good stewards of God's gifts.

The United Methodist Church

All creation is the Lord's, and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it. Water, air, soil, minerals, energy resources, plants, animal life, and space are to be valued and conserved because they are God's creation and not solely because they are useful to human beings. God has granted us stewardship of creation. We should meet these stewardship duties through acts of loving care and respect. Economic, political, social, and technological developments have increased our human numbers, lengthened and enriched our lives. However, these developments have led to regional defoliation, dramatic extinction of species, massive human suffering, overpopulation, misuse and over-consumption of natural and nonrenewable resources, particularly by industrialized societies. This continued course of action jeopardizes the natural heritage that God has entrusted to all generations. Therefore, let us recognize the responsibility of the church

and its members to place a high priority on changes in economic, political, social, and technological lifestyle to support a more ecologically equitable and sustainable world leading to a higher quality of life for all of God's creation.

Mandates for Going Green

Sophisticated technology, a culture of convenience, general affluence and a highly urban or suburban lifestyle have taken most of us far away from the living conditions prevalent in the Bible. So, we tend to forget a very basic biblical starting point -- we can't have a good relationship with God and take our proper place in the world without paying attention to our surroundings.

The Bible sends a strong message that being faithful requires us to maintain a just and righteous relationship with God, with other human beings and with the rest of creation. These three relationships are interconnected; therefore, when we hurt one, the other relationships are harmed too. From Genesis through the New Testament, we learn that the environmental crises we face today are social and spiritual ones, not simply biological and technical problems. Thus, when we try to model greater environmental responsibility in any gathering, we are trying to repair social, biological, and spiritual brokenness.

The Book of Genesis and the Psalms help us understand that the creation is a gift from God. Everything in creation is created by God and is good. That is why we, and all other parts of creation, have intrinsic worth and are sacred. The Psalmists assume that humans have much to learn from nature and that all creation participates in praise and glorification of God (Psalms 19, 36, 65). The book of Job underscores the inherent value of the nonhuman world. Because all life forms come from God, we all are dependent upon God, and are interdependent with each other. Consider what it would be like to plan an event by first asking the question, "How can the details of this event glorify God and glorify creation?" How would you make different decisions about the human and natural resources used for the event if you kept in mind that all are precious gifts from God?

Traditionally, many Christians have viewed the natural world as basically for our benefit and use -- certainly not of equal spiritual standing as human beings. Often, people read Genesis as a license to dominate and subjugate nature (e.g., Genesis 1:26-28) or to be stewards of creation (Genesis 2). However, the biblical message of environmental justice is more complicated and radical than simply requiring us to manage natural resources wisely and utilize technology and laws to maintain a healthy environment. Creation plays a central role in God's covenants and in the Christian understanding of salvation.

If nothing else, the Bible is a series of stories about covenants. When God makes a covenant with Noah, for example, God also makes a commitment to creation (Genesis 8-9). The Old Testament details covenants containing Sabbath or Jubilee provisions that attempt to restore the right economic and environmental relationships among peoples (landowners, slaves, immigrants, the indebted) and the land (Exodus 20:8-11, 23:10-12, Deuteronomy 15, Leviticus 25, Micah 2:1-3). When the covenant is broken, all parties to it are harmed. In Isaiah, we see the earth mourning and withering from the pollution that is the result of people's transgression of the laws.

The Christian covenant is consistent with the Hebraic. As God's incarnation, Jesus has the vocation to restore right relations with the land (in fact, all of nonhuman creation) as well as to liberate the poor and suffering. (Mark 16:15, John 3:17, Romans 8:18-21.) So, when we plan a gathering, we need to keep in mind environmental, racial, and economic justice goals because they are interconnected.

Practically, the covenants call us to think about the health, social, environmental, and economic impact of what we buy, use, and throw away at a gathering. Ideally, this means we think in bigger terms than just the welfare of the people attending the event. Instead, we need to think of the well-being of creation and of all its inhabitants along the way. "What went into producing the products we buy or use for the gathering? What will our impact be on the welfare of the workers in and neighborhoods around any facilities we might use?"

For example, if we plan an event that produces a lot of garbage, where will it go? What will be the impact of its disposal? What is our responsibility if we throw away a lot of plastic and it is burned, thus producing toxic dioxins? The Bible says we cannot bury our head in the sand and not worry about the consequences of what we do. When we try to implement a green guideline, we can have multiple beneficial social, environmental, and economic outcomes. For example, when we reduce the amount of trash we produce at an event, we reduce the financial and ecological pressure on the local community where it will be discarded. We reduce any negative health impacts that waste disposal has on surrounding neighborhoods. We also may be preserving natural resources and reducing workers' and communities' exposure to hazardous chemicals in manufacturing processes.

We often tend to romanticize or downplay creation in our faith lives. We may think of nature when we refer to God as Creator or Sustainer, but not when we talk about God as Redeemer. Yet, the promise Jesus Christ brings in the New Testament for salvation and redemption is not simply for humankind but for all of creation. In the New Testament (e.g., Romans 8; 1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 21), salvation includes recreating the entire universe to its intended ecological balance. The balance may mean changes which can be frightening to us. Yet, it is our responsibility to respect and work toward this balance, even when we do not understand God's plan or when changing is not convenient or comfortable for us.

One way this biblical point plays out in planning gatherings concerns choosing a location for the event. Have we chosen a site that is beautiful but totally unrealistic ecologically? For example, is it located in a desert and does it use a tremendous amount of water for fountains, green grass, or lush landscaping? Is the facility located on or near an earthquake fault, in a flood plane, or on a fragile coastline? Does the facility require high energy use (heat or air conditioning) to make the indoor climate comfortable? We can choose locations and facilities designed to have a low impact on their environment rather than high impact or high risk.

When we think of the salvation process, there is a major difference between humans and creation. Unlike humans, nature participates in redemption not because of its sinfulness, but because of its pain and suffering. How are we connected with this pain and suffering? How is our redemption linked to the healing of humanity and the earth?

Education and resources

There are many denominational and other resources which give us ideas for prayer and worship, advocacy and changing our individual and corporate lifestyles.

National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Working Group
www.ncccecojustice.org

Web of Creation
www.webofcreation.org

Earth Ministry
www.earthministry.org

New Community Project
www.newcommunityproject.org
Eco-Justice Ministries
www.eco-justice.org

Center for the New American Dream
www.newdream.org

Church of the Brethren
www.brethren.org/genbd/witness/CareforCreation.htm

Episcopal Church
www.episcopalchurch.org/1829_ENG_HTM.htm?menupage=1847

Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
www.elca.org/socialstatements/environment/

Presbyterian Church
www.pcusa.org/environment

Presbyterians for Restoring Creation
www.prcweb.org

United Church of Christ
www.ucc.org/justice/book/jw11-02.pdf

United Methodist Church
www.umc.org/interior.asp?mid=676
<http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/environmental/index.html>



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