



***Things I wish Jesus would have
said...about caring for creation***

Luke 10.25-37

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OVERVIEW EFFECT – OUTER SPACE

No one living during the first century at the time of Jesus would have had the chance to view earth from outer space. Their vantage point would have been different. They would have seen their world stretch out seemingly infinitely into the horizon. And with far fewer people each consuming less, their impact on the natural world would have been minimal compared to today. When working the land and spending a lot of their time outdoors, they likely would have been more rooted and connected to the natural world around them. It is no surprise then, that Jesus often used language about nature, sowing seeds, vines and branches, stories with animals...

In one example Jesus shares this teaching from Matthew 6:25-34.

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life^[a]?”

²⁸“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Perhaps some of you might be thinking that this is an odd passage to use if trying to inspire concern about protecting the environment. After all “Don’t Worry” doesn’t feel like the strongest *slogan* for environmentalists. But something interesting that this scripture does is, it seems to presupposes a stable ecosystem that appears to be a premise on which this story is told. The idea here is humans should not worry so much about our well-being, when we can see the birds of the air and the lilies of the fields are

taken care of. When the lilies of the field and the birds of the air are able to thrive we too should trust in God and not worry so much about our own situation. There is a premise that God has provided a natural ecosystem, which can sustain birds, lilies, and humans. But for me, given our current situation, this begs an important question... What if in some situations through deforestation, humans have destroyed the habitats and food sources for birds? What if there is desertification or polluted soil preventing lilies from growing? In that case, I think we are not only justified in our worry, but compelled to act to fulfill our role as stewards.

This world that God created is incredibly complex and beautiful. At its best and healthiest, it has been perfectly designed for supporting human life and many other species of animals. In Genesis, we see we are called upon to be *stewards*, caretakers of creation. Through our God given abilities, we have power and an intellect, which ultimately gives us agency and dominion over much of Creation. With this immense power comes great responsibility.

Throughout history, many Christians have argued that the Earth is here purely to support our existence and desires. That we can bend and manipulate it to our will, use up its abundance and consume anything and everything for our use. God created the world for us and we can use it endlessly. To this day, many Christians push back against environmental efforts saying not to worry because God is in control or referencing our right of dominion over the Earth from Genesis. There are also those who may insist that “this is not our home” and if the end times are imminent why worry about life here on earth? For a long time these attitudes, while destructive, were mitigated by a robust and resilient Earth that could sustain itself and resist the plunder of many. However, at some point the overwhelming force of human overuse, destruction, greed and consumption can tip the scales of what the natural world is capable of supporting.

So this morning, when I think about things I wish Jesus would have said, I wish Jesus would have said, “look out, be cautious and aware of your ability to have a destructive effect on creation. If you do not take care of the world, do not assume that it will always support your every need.”

I wish Jesus would have said this to remove ambiguity about our culpability in the destruction of the *natural* world.

I know that there are many in this body who take creation care very seriously and do a much better job than I do on a daily basis at striving towards protecting and restoring

the natural world. So much of what I have to say this morning is indeed preaching to the choir. But if you are skeptical about the effect that humanity is having on this planet, I hope that you might come to understand the seriousness of the issues and recognize that seeking sustainability and good stewardship of *creation* is essential to following Jesus.

The way we live our lives each day can contribute to the poor health of our planet. Many of the products we buy have negative effects both through the raw materials and energy used to produce them, and in the pollution they cause when we no longer need them. Plastics and styrofoam used for a few minutes find its way into waterways and natural habitats threatening creation for centuries to come. Years ago, I remember hearing a story about how scientists were at first confused when they found a few tiny piles of plastic trash and bones on remote pacific Islands. Further exploration helped them discover bodies of birds in various levels of decay around these piles. They realized that after the birds had died, their bodies, skin, and feathers had naturally decomposed and all that was left behind were these piles of plastic that the birds had ingested.

The pollution of chemicals and toxins as byproducts in manufacturing make their way into the environment. Who knows what their long-term effects might be. Amphibians, with their porous skin are more susceptible to chemical changes and there have been an alarming decrease in their populations. Amphibian species have been going extinct at a rate over 200 times the natural background average. Because of their environmental sensitivity, they may in fact be the canary in the coal mine for chemical pollution. Amphibians as well as other plants and animals face threats not just from pollution but also from habitat loss.

Despite efforts to preserve and protect habitats, deforestation and habitat destruction continues. Rainforests are burned to make way for grazing cattle and palm oil production to feed our insatiable consumption. The oceans are being drastically overfished with both the size and numbers of fish continuing to decline. The census of Marine life, a decades long survey completed in 2010 estimated that 90% of large fish have disappeared from our oceans. Meanwhile, wild animals, not including livestock, have declined by 58% between 1970 and 2012. It is estimated that by 2020 wild animal populations will have decreased by two-thirds. 67% in just 50 years. We see with elephants their numbers have decreased from over 10 Million around 1900 to an estimated 350,000 today, that is a 97% loss driven largely by habitat destruction and poaching.

Our planet with an incredibly robust, resilient and complex planetary ecosystem has thrived since the last extinction 65 million years ago that wiped out the dinosaurs. That was Earth's 5th major extinction event, we are now in the midst of what scientists are warning is the 6th extinction event, the Anthropocene, caused almost entirely by human civilization.

This is happening now, this is happening on our watch. I simply do not know what acceptable answer we will be able to give to future generations when they ask us how we let this happen. It was too expensive and we did not want to spend the money? We trusted that God had willed it? We didn't want to give up our lifestyles?

This failure on the part of humanity is truly a failure to live up to our responsibility as stewards of Creation. While the problems and solutions are often tied up in politics, this is not merely a political issue. This is a moral issue, a justice issue and something all Christians should feel convicted to address.

When looking at all the trend lines of habitat destruction and biodiversity loss, climate predictions and sea level rise, it is very easy to become pessimistic and cynical about our future. Some have even argued that we may have already passed critical tipping points when it comes to climate change. And yet I hold hope for the future.

I hold hope in the same thing that gives me hope in the face of violence, of racism and injustice. That is a hope firmly rooted in the life and ways of Jesus. In the scripture from earlier we read "But seek first God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." The solution is being committed to trusting the teachings of Jesus. And while I wish Jesus would have said something more to warn us about our capacity as humans to wreak havoc on the environment, we can find plenty in what Jesus did say and do, to guide us.

Jesus demonstrated a life of simplicity. He was not concerned about accumulating possessions, and while many of us may not feel called to give away all that we own, we can be much more thoughtful about what we do consume and purchase. As consumers, we hold an incredible amount of power with how and what we choose to spend money on. Purchasing fair-trade, like we sell here at church, locally sourced or environmentally friendly products can send a strong message to producers. Eating less meat can also have a huge impact, and for those not able or interested in becoming vegetarian, even just giving up meat a few days a week can add up.

In our throw away culture, it has become much easier to purchase new things than repair old things. In your bulletin today, you may notice a blurb about Ed Good working to repair shovels and heaters for BHA. I have a snow shovel in my office that is perfectly usable since Ed added a new metal edging. I know that he would be interested to share about how to do some of these simple repairs yourself.

Jesus was not in the business of destruction, but of growth and restoration. I have hope for the future because this wonderfully created world we find ourselves in, is more intricate, complex and elegant than any of us can truly imagine and understand. Given the time and space, creation has incredible resilience and restorative abilities. Sometimes being good stewards can involve just getting out of the way and protecting nature so it can do its own thing.

There is a popular story about the dramatic changes that have happened in Yellowstone where wolves have been re-introduced after disappearing decades ago. A cascading effect of reintroducing wolves had an effect on the grazing habits of their prey, which in turn effected plant life, which effected soil and waterways, which in turn effected other animals like beavers, which then, with dams also had an effect of the waterways and geology altering the landscape and entire ecosystem.

Jesus spent a lot of time outdoors within the natural world, much more than most of us do today. Humans have become incredibly skilled at manipulating plant and animal life into products for our use and consumption but we don't spend as much time around things in their natural state. Look around from where you sit this morning, we can see the handiwork of humans all around us, but aside from these flowers, and one another, we often find ourselves in man-made bubbles. We often move from one climate controlled and human made space to another. Again, I am not suggesting we give up our homes and amenities, but it is easy to be lulled into complacency about what the "real world" really is when we surround ourselves with the trappings of humanity and forget to appreciate the beauty of the *divinely* created world and wildlife around us.

The creativity and craftsmanship we possess is a wonderful thing. But it cannot hold a candle to the handiwork of God. The complexity of ecosystems, the miracle of organic chemistry and epigenetics, should captivate and impress us more than any smart phone.

There is little doubt that technology and innovation will be necessary tools in efforts to protect and restore the environment, but our true hope for a sustainable future is more dependent upon a deeper connection and understanding of the divinely created natural

world. Just as birds and lilies hold trust in God and in God's divine creation, we too must look to Creation as a source of inspiration and with conviction to protect it.

So this morning, I would like to encourage all of us to think about the very real and serious challenges that lie before us. What can we do in our lives to be the stewards of creation that we were created to be. How does living out our faith intersect with consumption and care for creation. How can we be more connected to the natural world around us?

I would like to close with this Passage from Job

“But ask the Beasts what they think—let them teach you;
let the birds tell you what's going on.
Put your ear to the earth—learn the basics.
Listen—the fish in the ocean will tell you their stories.
Isn't it clear that they all know and agree
that God is sovereign, that he holds all things in his hand—
Every living soul, yes,
every breathing creature?