



ELIZABETHTOWN
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

Called to be earthkeepers

Genesis 1

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Spring is coming to the farm—we know it. Not because of the warm sunshine, which has been suspiciously absent in April. Not because we’ve been able to play in the dirt, because we haven’t spent much time in the garden yet...we hope those days are not too far off. We know that spring is coming because last Thursday, the farmers were out, en force, spreading liquid steer manure on fields near and far. The Kubotas and John Deere’s and Case IH’s came out of hibernation that day, and worked to coat the earth with a lovely brown crust. And the scent is unmistakable—the field behind our house is only 25 feet or so from the back door so we know it intimately. And our dog Watson knows it, too. He can’t resist the lure of a newly spread field. And so, last Thursday, on our evening walk, we unhooked Watson’s leash to run the back 40, in the hopes he would get lots of exercise. But we didn’t realize, that in the back field, out of our sight, he not only was getting some good exercise, he was having a tasty snack.

Later that evening, we realized that Watson’s snack didn’t exactly agree with his digestive system, and he took it out on the living room rug. We weren’t sure which end was up, but it didn’t really matter because liquid cow manure was the culprit either way.

Yes indeed—in spite of cold temps, blowing flurries that never quit, spring is here. And this week, we recognize Earth Day. Today to be exact. It marks the anniversary of the beginning of the modern environmental movement nearly 50 years ago. Earth Day 1970 gave voice to that emerging consciousness, channeling the energy of the anti-war protest movement and putting environmental concerns on the front page, where they’ve been ever since.

For us, as a people of faith, it has an additional dynamic, in that “the earth is the Lords and the fullness thereof.”

2 We have been called by God...to care for creation, as co-creators with God. As Earthkeepers.

And so...just how are we doing with that?

It's no secret that scientists estimate that thousands of species of plants and animals become extinct each and every year. This is increasing exponentially over the years and appears to be due to us...humankind. The primary culprit is habitat destruction caused by agriculture, ranching and urbanization, although the hunting and capture of endangered species also plays a role. We saw that in Nigeria, where elephants have been the target of poachers over the years. A recent study also predicted that global warming will be a serious factor in the survival of God's creation, with as many as one-quarter of all species of plants and animals becoming extinct in the next 50 years as a result of the warming global climate. Just this week on NPR, there was a piece about shrinking coral reefs due to warmer ocean temps. It's reaching every corner of the globe, as whole ecosystems are affected. And there's plenty of local news, too. Lancaster Newspaper had a front page spread this week, titled *Just How Bad is Our Air...* right here in our communities. The vote is in—air pollution levels for soot and smog in Lancaster County continue to be among the worst in the nation. It seems like bad news abounds and for good reason.

If we return to the scripture read in the drama, we see that Genesis 1.26 continues "God blessed humankind 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." This sense of "dominion over" creation for our own consumption and purposes has not served us well over the centuries as earthkeepers. "Dominion over" has often been understood as ruling,

subduing, and exercising power over, maybe even entitlement. It implies some sort of aggressive or violent destruction for our own means.

It is true that a false view of dominion has played a role in the mistreatment of creation, but a correct understanding of the concept can lead to responsibility, stewardship and sacrificial service that serves God and the common good of all creation.

The Hebrew word *radah*, translated as dominion in this passage, does not however mean destruction, rather responsibility. We are to mirror the dominion, or *radah*, of our Creator. We do unto creation as God has done unto us. God loves, sustains, and cares for the universe and all its inhabitants day by day. God's grace is not limited to humans but is poured out on the whole universe, infused in its very essence. Therefore we are to express love and care toward the world.

Our own denomination adopted a statement nearly 30 years ago—Creation: Called to Care. The opening paragraph reads:

“Why should Christians care about the environment? Simply because we learn in Genesis that God has promised to fulfill all of creation, not just humanity, and has made humans the stewards of it. More importantly, it continues, God came into the very midst of creation to be ‘God with us’—Jesus, Immanuel. God’s redemption makes the creation whole, the place where God’s will is being done on earth as it is in heaven.” God didn’t create the world on a whim and suspend it out there somewhere. God isn’t separate from creation. God is with us...right in the center of creation, in this beautiful, messy place. Therefore, care for creation...is a matter of faith.

We have the opportunity to reflect God at work, in caring for and transforming all of creation. To follow this aspect

4 of our multifaceted calling as humans is to image in our lives the One who is at work in the world—the cosmos that God so loves—creating, sustaining, and liberating creation. We are called to be that kind of earthkeepers!

One of the advantages we have as preachers is that we live with a theme and scripture all week long before preaching on Sunday. And so I've tried to look for places and ways that we are making a difference for the good, to reverse abuse of creation and to work at ways of being better earthkeepers.

Did you know we have a Green Team that is working at educational pieces on our behalf? Just exit this worship space and out in the hallway you'll find a bulletin board with tips for gardening, for growing food and eating very local! Check it out! The Green Team is also researching green sources of power to recommend to our Resources Commission. Just this week they investigated a possible source of electricity that is 100% wind-powered, reducing our consumption of fossil fuel.

On Wednesday, I had the delight of visiting Ann Ziegler Pineda and her third-grade class at Locust Grove Mennonite School. When she opened the door of the closet in the classroom, there was a stack about 3 feet tall of Styrofoam trays. The school serves hot lunches on the trays, which are then discarded. Instead of throwing them in the trash, these 3rd grade kids collect and rinse them and they are delivered to an appropriate recycling facility. These students are learning to be earthkeepers in very practical ways!

And our building improvements committee is taking seriously this congregation's intent that any expansion and renovation that is done to our facility include ecological considerations. I love that we are looking at geo-thermal

options, solar panels, double-paned windows and increased insulation. We are earthkeepers!

I recently learned about the 3 R's in caring for creation—apparently they are a mantra of Earth Day. Instead of reading, writing and arithmetic, it's Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. My 3-year-old granddaughter brought them home from Toddler Hour at the local library. We've been chanting it this week. What if...each one of us here, using the wisdom of this mantra, found one new way this week to reduce, reuse or recycle.

Consider that it's the little things that we do every day that can really make a difference. Consider these:

- Reduce consumption by shopping small businesses. I received a gift that was purchased from a small in-home business marketed through Etsy. It is a second hand, but like new, t-shirt—transformed by silk screening with environmentally safe paints with the message “The Mountains are Singing,” from Psalm 98.8.
- Reuse—use everything at least twice, I learned on a Learning Tour with New Community Project. So this week I rinsed out and reused a baggie. Maybe Grandma's practice wasn't just about being frugal. Maybe she was a woman ahead of her time!
- Recycle—I just received an invitation to my niece's baby shower. The invitation calls it a sprinkle instead of a shower. “Bri welcomes your pre-loved clothing” it says.

6

We have this beautiful world that God so loves, that is for our delight. God is here, in our midst, and we are called to care and love it, too.

Love the acorn...love the antelope,
the butterfly and the boxer,
the crustacean and the cat,
the donkey and the dragon fly,
the elephant and the eel,
the flycatcher and the fern,
the giraffe and the gecko,
the hummingbird and the heavens,
the iguana and the isthmus,
the jabberwocky and the jade,
the kangaroo and the koala,
the lemur and the louse,
the manatee and the Milky Way,
the nightingale and the North Pole,
the otter and the ox,
the peony and the pony,
the quail and the quetzal,
the rooster and the rutabaga,
the salamander and the snowflake,
the tomcat and the tomato,
the umbrella bird and the upright brome,
the vulture and the vampire bat,
the wallaby and the weevil,
the x-ray tetra and the xerophyte,
the yak and the yucca,
the zucchini and the zebra.

And we are called to be earthkeepers and we join the psalmist:

7

¹O Lord, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

³When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;

⁴what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals[a] that you care for them?

⁵Yet you have made them a little lower than God,[b]
and crowned them with glory and honor.

⁶You have given them dominion over the works of your
hands;

you have put all things under their feet,

⁷all sheep and oxen,

and also the beasts of the field,

⁸the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

⁹O Lord, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

(Psalm 8)

