



ELIZABETHTOWN
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

And God saw that it was good

Genesis 1

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AND GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD!

And God saw that it was good. Creation is goodness in its purest form. We are instinctively drawn to the earth and its beauty.

We have an intuitive, emotional bond with the earth. Whether it is getting your hands in the soil and taking part in the miracle of growing things, feeling awestruck by the beauty of a sunset, listening to the waves crash on the shore. And fair enough, for some it's sitting in the padded wicker chair in a screened in porch listening to the crickets and watching an afternoon shower roll in. We all have at least one place where we feel connected to creation, we breathe a little deeper, our soul rests. And there we find God. Think about your happy outdoor place for a moment. What is it like? How does it make you feel. Where is God? We are connected to the earth.

My happy places are a little weird. Every once in a while I enter outdoor adventure events that challenge me to be my best. And you all know me well enough to now that I can be a little competitive, and so I usually have a goal to finish in the top quarter of my age group. But my ultimate goal is to run my best race. To know I did my very best in preparation and performance.

But next week, I am embarking on a run that will have no other competition, and will be solely for the joy of being connected to the earth and to friends. It's a journey with my brother and another friend—we will run the Grand Canyon from the South Rim to the North Rim. Then back again. We will cover between 41–46 miles depending on which trails we take. In this case what goes down, must come up. It will be about 22,000 feet of elevation changes. 11,000 going up, 11,000 going down. If everything goes well we are guessing it will take us between 12–15 hours. Because of that elevation change, over the course of the day, the temperature will vary 60 degrees. Probably in the 30s when we leave the rim early morning, and 90s when we cross the Colorado River for the second time in the afternoon. It is going to be a challenge

2

unlike any I've ever done. But more than that, it is an opportunity to connect with the earth and my closest friends. And with God.

CARE FOR CREATION

Often close to Earth Day, we take the opportunity to explore Caring for Creation as a matter of faith. Not just because we want to “be green” or because it suits our politics. But because it's God's world under serious duress, and the most vulnerable people are the ones who suffer the consequences. As people of God this matters! And compels us to act.

And you know what? As I started thinking about this canyon trip, and how we can act as those who care for God's creation, I started to see some similarities in the journey.

To accomplish this we will have to:

- Take the first step
- Be smart
- Rely on one another
- Simplify and reduce
- Have faith

TAKE THE FIRST STEP

For the canyon it means looking over the edge and then putting one foot in front of the next.

For us in caring for creation, it's facing reality. It's said that plant and animal species are going extinct at a rate of 50–100 per day. If the earth keeps warming at its current rate, estimates are that by 2050 we could lose $\frac{1}{4}$ of the world's species. But by 2100 it could be $\frac{1}{2}$. It's called the Sixth Extinction. Climate change, out of control human population growth, pollution, irresponsible development, and other factors would also play key roles. And God saw that it was good? Having the courage to care for God's creation means we will have to get over skepticism, apathy, and comfort.

BE SMART

For the canyon, it's not a Rubik's cube, but it is proper pacing, nutrition and hydration, safety and packing. And thinking on your feet if something goes sideways.

For our earth, it means we will need to think evermore intelligently about our choices, beyond just paper, plastic, or reusable. We need to not only work harder, but also be smarter. It's thought that if we really tried we could make a 60–80% reduction in greenhouse gases. That enormous reduction would take a reconfiguration of transportation, agriculture, and household energy use¹—and a change in our economic system and attitudes to value conservation rather than consumption.

It means we must encourage and foster our best and brightest—talking to your kids mostly—put your talents towards environmental science, engineering, chemistry and biology, and ethics.

RELY ON ONE ANOTHER

Over 40-some miles one of all of us will drag, be groping for a second wind, need encouragement and aid. Not all of us need a knife, water purification tabs, etc.

People are coming together across the political divide, and they are reaching out across the religious divide as well. Rev. Ted Haggard, president of the 30 million-member National Association of Evangelicals notes that, “The environment is a values issue. There are significant and compelling theological reasons why it should be a banner issue for the Christian right.” The Christian left could not agree more and alliances are being formed to unite many peoples of faith in an effort to care for what we have been gifted—the garden, this earth. We can do this, but we're going to have to do it together.

¹17% of our fossil fuels are used mostly for packaging and shipping and storing; beef production in #1 GHG producer globally—lots of methane, nitrous oxide and CO₂; 26,000 pounds of greenhouse gases produced per household per year for heating, cooling, water heating, etc. Source: New Community Project.

4

SIMPLIFY AND REDUCE

You know, you think about what you will buy and use when you have to carry it all. Here's a picture of the things that I will be carrying. Plus all the granola bars I can carry. Imagine if we thought about what we buy and consume in real life similar to how I have to think about packing for this run. Namely that you have to carry everything on your back. Jesus warns us about how our possessions can weigh us down in life and skew our relationships with God and one another.

Our planet is overcome by waste and trash. "The average person in the US uses about 200 pounds of materials daily for our material and energy consumption."²

If that weren't enough, the real eye-opener: my consumption is 60 times as much as the poorest of the world and draws on 20 acres of the world's productive land. 4.5 acres would be our fair share.³ If everyone on earth consumed at my rate, we would need four more planets to remain sustainable. This is not how we want to handle God's creation. We must simplify.

HAVE FAITH

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for; the conviction of things not (yet!) seen. Hebrews 11.1

Hearing the grim statistics, recognizing our own desire to consume, acknowledging that the global system will not change overnight, one could understandably throw up their hands and say, "So what? It's useless—even hypocritical—for me make an attempt to be green even as I drive, fly, spend, heat, etc. But there are people making the commitment, right here.

It is a blessing to be part of this congregation. I am constantly inspired by what I see people doing who are part of this congregation. Whether I see you biking or walking around town to reduce CO2 emissions, taking action with your legislators. Herb and Joanne High help us recycle every month. Here in the church we are doing our best, too. The front office and

²New Community Project, <http://newcommunityproject.org/averageamerican.shtml>

³Global Footprint Network, http://www.footprintnetwork.org/gfn_sub.php?content=national_footprints

pastors couldn't stand that paper recycling was discontinued so we made a plan and have instituted our own recycling system for that waste.

Get out there—connect. If you're a kid, sign up for Camp Swatara. If you're an adult sign up to volunteer at Camp Swatara (there are posts spring and summer working with kids, but also helping in the kitchen and elsewhere), and sign up for the family camping weekend in June.

Our building project has considered environmental impact each step of the way. One reason we chose to stay and renovate on this site was to reduce construction waste, and not sprawl on farmland somewhere else. Renovations will also improve efficiencies: better windows, Geothermal heating and cooling zones will save energy and money and reduce our carbon footprint.

We are one week removed from Easter, the ultimate comeback story. The epitome of hope. That with God not situation is too bleak. I have faith that we can turn the earth around, too. And there will be a time when God again looks and sees that, indeed all is good again.

