

Full of Wonder
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Date: February 22, 2015

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“Full of Wonder” Pilgrim Church UCC February 22, 2015—National Preach-In on Global Warming (Genesis 1:26-31)

This summer, to celebrate turning the big 3-0, my sister and I spent a few days visiting Glacier National Park in Montana. There were many reasons why I chose Glacier—it was our grandparents' favorite National Park, more so than even Yellowstone or Yosemite. And I wanted to see why they loved it so much and allow myself to experience that level of awe and wonder we can feel so often in nature. It wasn't that long of a drive from my sister's house, and the glaciers are melting at such an alarming rate that there may not be any remaining soon. So it became this mission for me to see the Park as my grandparents saw it.

Once we got to Glacier, we realized how much global warming is having an effect on this natural wonder. In 1850, there were 150 glaciers—most were still present in 1910 when the Park was established. In 2010, that number fell to 25. There are now only 25 significant glaciers left to see, and by 2030 there may be none.[1] Maureen and I saw Jackson Glacier, one of the better known glaciers you can view from the Going-to-the-Sun-Road. As we went back to the car we both were pretty quiet as we realized that we may have just seen a site that future generations will no longer glimpse. Jackson Glacier has shrunk in size from when our grandparents saw it to when we saw it this summer. And that matters not just for people like us to admire, but to balance the ecosystem and help sustain life. The loss of glaciers leads to alpine meadows dying which affects the high elevation plant and animal species and can lead to more forest fires and the devastation of this beautiful land. The trip to Glacier National Park personalized global warming—as not just a political issue out there but as a moral issue in my own heart. Many of you could point to similar sacred places for you or your family that personalize global warming and how it's changing our landscapes, not just affecting us but affecting all of creation.

Being rather educated people, we probably already know that global warming is a present reality and not some future prediction. Since around 1970 our average temperature in the U.S. has increased by almost 2 degrees and temperatures could rise another 2-4 degrees over the next few decades. Of course the earth has natural periods of heating and cooling, but with all the carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide in our air, the changes are happening too fast. In the past, the air temperature and carbon dioxide levels would go up and down together, that's how it's supposed to occur in nature. Now, carbon dioxide is 40 times higher than it should be. The air is changing so fast due to Greenhouse Gases, explaining the rate of temperature increases and glaciers shrinking like we can witness in Glacier National Park. All of this means that extreme weather events are becoming more frequent—heat waves, cold snaps, extreme rain and snow, long periods of flooding or droughts, and high winds.[2] Unless we start making some changes to the way we function on this planet, the future doesn't look too bright.

Now I'm no scientist, but as an ordained minister, I can say why Christians should care about global warming and what we can do as Christians to witness to God's good creation. For us, we can go back to the beginning—to the Creation story in the book of Genesis. In our sacred story, human beings are created on the sixth day. We are part of God's good creation, not the center of the universe as we sometimes behave.

The tricky part is the word "dominion" in Genesis Chapter 1 verse 26. The translation in the New Revised Standard Version presents God as saying: "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." [3] The Common English Bible translates this verse: "Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth." [4] Finally, The Message translation: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature so that they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and, yes, the Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of the Earth." [5]

Can we see how translating one word from Hebrew into English makes a huge difference in the way we see humanity's role on this earth as presented in Chapter One of the Book of Genesis? Having dominion over the earth, taking charge of the earth, being responsible for the earth itself. Why? Because we reflect God's nature, we resemble God, we possess the likeness of God. Suffice it to say that these concepts can point to stewardship.

To be a steward means to manage other people's property, finances, or other affairs. When we are God's stewards, we're taking care of God's creation. We're responsible for the earth God gives out of love for all creatures, not just human beings. It reminds me of the little prayer loved far and wide by dog owners like me: "O God, help me to be the person my dog thinks I am." Sorry to say there's not a similar prayer for cat owners, and I'll leave it at that! Since we humans are feeling and thinking beings, then maybe we have a responsibility to care for the earth and for the creatures with whom we share the earth—to be good managers and caretakers. We can be co-creators with God and help God mend the world.

There's this concept in Hasidic Judaism called *tikkun olam* that human beings participate in the drama of mending the world. We can't passively sit on the sidelines and expect others to fix the problems that we see, not when we are called to be active co-creators. Some would say that God is Light and Love. In the act of Creation, God actually diminished God's own self. God spread Light and Love out into the world, gifting each one of us the Divine Spark of God. You know, being made in the very image and likeness of God and all. Picture Michelangelo's "The Creation of Adam" where God reaches out to give the spark of life to Adam. Now God's probably not a white bearded dude in the sky, but you get the idea. So when we help God mend this world of ours, we spread some of that Light and Love and give these gifts back to God! Greg Mobley, my former Old Testament professor describes *tikkun olam* by writing: "Before time, the blinding Infinite Light exploded into a billion sparks . . . this creation of the many left the One diminished. It is the sacred duty of every person to let his or her little light shine, shine, shine, one good deed at a time, and thus restore the full brilliance of the Light of Lights." [6]

That's the thing about the Creation Story in Genesis or Global Warming—they are such huge concepts, such mind-blowing occurrences that it's hard to consider our place in the story and what we can possibly do to make a difference. That's why *tikkun olam* can be really moving. When we let our little lights shine one good deed at a time, we're restoring the brilliance of God. We're living into the idea that we are created in God's very image and we have been entrusted with this earth to be responsible for. We can be God's stewards of this great, big, beautiful earth! Of course we can take this on a metaphorical level—we're looking for truth and meaning in these sacred texts. Jesus taught us in our tradition to love God with our hearts, souls, minds, and strengths and to love our neighbors as ourselves. If we truly and completely love God—doesn't it make sense that we should love this world that comes from God, this world that God entrusted to our care?

So let's end with some good old practical hope—what can we do to be good stewards? Hopefully you saw the story we linked in E-Notes about our own Alice Van Evera who formed the group Save Tomorrow with her friend Mari McBride. A few years ago, when they were only in third grade, Alice and friends testified in front of the Lexington Board of Selectmen to change restrictions in our town for solar panels on public buildings. They quoted Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax*: "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better, it's not." The solar panel article passed unanimously, and they even got a round of applause (which isn't supposed to happen at these meetings.) Even if it would have passed without the girls witnessing to climate change, it's important for us to speak out when we feel passionately about making this world better for future generations.[7] And it's never too early or too late to begin helping God mend the world.

Today there's an optional political response to this National Preach-In on Global Warming. We can send postcards to Massachusetts Senators Markey and Warren which affirm that we have a moral obligation to protect the planet and we call on them to support the EPA's Carbon Pollution Standards for new and existing Power Plants. The good people at Interfaith Power and Light make it easy for congregations to take action as we are so moved this morning. And today wouldn't be happening without the tireless dedication of Barbara Munkres over the years.

So the questions become what may inspire us in the days ahead and what simple steps can make a difference? As I shared with the children this morning, it's about our daily habits: can we walk or ride our bikes sometimes, turn off the lights, unplug our cell phone chargers, change our laundry habits, put on a sweater instead of turning up the heat, take shorter showers, drink tap water, plant some trees (weather permitting), and reduce/reuse/recycle? As Christians, we can respond to global warming so that the wonder of God's creation will not be lost. Thanks be to God. Amen.

[1] "Retreat of Glaciers in Glacier National Park," Northern Rocky Mountain Science Center (NOROCK), http://nrmsc.usgs.gov/research/glacier_retreat.htm

[2] "Fast Facts About Global Warming," Interfaith Power & Light.

[3] Genesis 1:26, NRSV.

[4] Genesis 1:26, The Common English Bible.

[5] Genesis 1:26, The Message.

[6] Greg Mobley, *The Return of the Chaos Monster—and other Backstories of the Bible*, 82.

[7] Andrea Shea, "Inspired by Films, Kid Environmentalists Take Action to 'Save Tomorrow By Helping Today,'" January 16, 2015, <http://artery.wbur.org/2015/01/16/films-inspire-young-lexington-enviro...>