

9/29/2019

“Receiving and Caring for Creation”

Genesis 2:4-9; 1 Timothy 4:1-5

Native American Ministries Sunday

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Theme: The Bible affirms that creation is sacred – that is, created by God (divine power), is to be cared for as well as benefitted from, and can reveal God’s mysterious ways.

With the increased awareness of and concern for our environment, influenced by everything from climate change and energy resource conservation, protecting endangered species and preventing animal abuse, to food and water shortages, I believe we would do well to learn from some of the traditional spiritual attitudes and practices of our Native American brothers and sisters.

As Chief Seattle has said, “Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.” (*UM N.A. Ministries Sunday resource 2008*)

So, let’s briefly consider the gift of creation and the web of life into which God our Creator has woven us, so that we may not only receive it as God’s good gift, but care for it as a sacred trust as well.

The very first book of the bible, Genesis (which means beginning) tells us that God created the heavens and the earth. In the so-called “first creation account” of Genesis 1, God created humankind, male and female in God’s image, telling them to “be fruitful and increase in number”, and to “fill the earth and subdue it.” (1:27-28 NRSV) And in the second chapter or account, we read that before rains fell upon the earth, streams of water came up from below the earth’s surface to water it. In this account, God created man, as yet unnamed, although the name Adam or “A-dam” in Hebrew, is likely related to the word “adamah”, or ground.

And God breathed into Adam the breath of life, and he became a living being or living soul. By God’s own breath we, all of humanity, draw the breath of life.

We go on to read in Genesis that God made all things and called them good. He provided the vegetation for humans and other animals to eat. God provided animals for human companionship and later also allowed them for human sustenance.

God later placed restrictions to his chosen people on certain foods which would cause illness, and foods that were sacrificed to other gods. This is where the Kosher laws of Jewish tradition are drawn from. In Paul's letter to Timothy, he addressed those restrictions that concerned Greek converts to Christianity. While Paul himself held to the Jewish Law found in the Torah (the first five books of the bible), he instructed Timothy and others not to be held bound to those restrictions if they received their food with thankfulness to God in the Spirit and the truth.

Paul writes . . .

*The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow receiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. **For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.***

(1 Timothy 4:1-5)

So what does this mean for us today?

First,

† **I believe that we should all be aware of what we eat and drink and how much we consume, for our diet and nutrition affect our health in many ways.** And some, who have allergies or addictions to certain substances, would do well to abstain.

I certainly do not claim to have all the answers or best practices. But I know that we can also become obsessed or anxious by worrying over everything we're doing wrong, or every new report that comes out about this food or that beverage – especially if their findings change every few years!

So I believe that moderation, informed choices, and even abstinence would be best for different persons and conditions.

Second,

† What we should be able to agree upon is **the importance of giving thanks to God who has provided our sustenance**. I believe we should, agreeing with traditional Native Americans, also be grateful for the life of any animal that was taken or given. With such an attitude, I believe there would be much less waste of food in our country.

So, what do you think about, talk about, and do before and while you are eating?

Let me encourage, even challenge you to remember that the food you eat is blessed by the word of God. And if you don't already, offer thanksgiving to the Creator for each meal this week, wherever you are.

Likewise, we need to be conscious and caring for all of God's creation, especially other people, because we are intertwined with all of it.

I'm glad to say I have been a longtime supporter of the United Methodist Society of Saint Andrew, which recently celebrated its 40th anniversary. Started by two pastors in the Virginia Annual Conference, I heard about it over 30 years ago from my then supervising pastor and adjunct faculty member of the seminary I was attending in Iowa. He had helped to inspire it. He told me about it when I mentioned to him that I expected to move to Virginia upon graduation, and hopefully transfer into that Conference. After doing so, I met those clergy, then serving full time in this ministry. Its mission is centered mostly upon using thousands of volunteers to glean and distribute produce donated by farmers, which would otherwise be left in their fields to waste, often because it was too oddly shaped to be sold in grocery stores. From just January through May of 2019 almost 8 million lbs. of produce was gleaned, providing over 23 million servings of fresh produce to food pantries, homeless shelters, and other non-profit agencies and providers.

Karen and I also see and respond to the need for food, water and other resources with our Native American sisters and brothers. I am thankful for those who have shared their time and witness with us today. And I look forward to furthering ways we can engage in mission support together with other United Methodists.

And it is just as much or more of blessing to share food and other resources with our CCEA Food Pantry, the Paris Foundation, the Rotating Shelter, and other local missions we support right here at CCUMC.

I invite you to share with me, in person or by email, some of the ways you feel moved and blessed by responding to the leading of the Spirit, to conserve or share God's provision and to make a positive difference in our world.

Let us remember that the earth we care for today is the earth that hopefully our children's children's children will inherit.

† **One other thing I want to mention today is that God can and does use creation to teach us of God's nature and ways.** That, too, is another way and reason to receive and care for creation.

Even those who have never heard of the God of Abraham, Isaac or Jacob, can still find witness to the Creator and sustainer of all.

The Book of Acts (17:22-28 NRSV) tells us that the Apostle Paul addressed those in the great meeting hall in the ancient Greek city of Athens, saying:

"Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things.

"From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being''; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.'"

This passage, my friends, is not a rational or excuse for human conquest in the name of God. Rather, it should be an affirmation that we are all related as God's offspring or children.

And when we share the earthly elements of bread and juice in the sacred act of Holy Communion, we, too, give thanks for the bread that sustains us and the fruit of the vine. But much more importantly, we give thanks for the great mystery and blessing of God's presence as we remember the gift of life, given by our Lord Jesus – "the bread of life"

who laid down his own earthly life for all people.

We remember that it was in the act of breaking the bread in Emmaus, that the eyes of those two heartbroken disciples were opened to realize with joy the risen Jesus in their presence.

We celebrate Holy Communion with Christ and one another, as we share the earthly elements consecrated by God's word and received with thanksgiving.

Let us therefore always and everywhere receive and care for God's good creation with praise and thanksgiving to God, awareness of what we may learn from it, and of its wise and loving use!

Benediction

(Adapted from Colossians 2:6)

As God has loved you, go forth and love the circle of life created by God's hand. As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in Christ. May you be a blessing to all whose paths cross your own. Amen.

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