

“A New Humanity to Meet the Present Need”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Earth Sabbath, Season of Eastertide, Sunday, April 28, 2013

(First Effort Preached in 2007; Adapted in 2008, 2010, and
2013)

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Psalm 104: 24-33

24 O Lord, how manifold are your works!

In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of
your creatures.

25 Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things
innumerable are there,

living things both small and great.

26 There go the ships and Leviathan that you formed to sport in
it.

27 These all look to you to give them their food in due season;

28 when you give to them, they gather it up;

when you open your hand, they are filled with good
things.

29 When you hide your face, they are dismayed;

when you take away their breath, they die and return to
their dust.

30 When you send forth your spirit, they are created;

and you renew the face of the ground.

31 May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works—

32 who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke.

33 I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

34 May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord.

Genesis 1: 1-5; 1: 26 – 2:2

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

26 Then God said, “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.”

27 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them, 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.”²⁹ God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.³¹ God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude.² And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.

Let us pray:

Creator God, creating still, by will and word and deed,

Create a new humanity to meet the present need.

Great Trinity, for this day we need your presence still.

Create, redeem, sustain us now to do your work and will.

Amen.

(Jane Parker Huber, 1977)

A New Humanity to Meet the Present Need

A couple was very concerned about their water bills.

As much as they sought to conserve water, their bills went up and up.

They checked their pipes for leaks and took shorter showers, but no change.

One day the husband was sick and stayed home from work.

He heard an odd noise and followed it to its source.

The family cat was leaning over the toilet watching the water flush out.

When the tank refilled, the cat stood on its hind legs

and, using both paws, pulled the lever. Again and again and again!

You and I have undoubtedly watched as dogs and babies played in the commode. Now you can see a video of the cat playing on *YouTube*.

I wonder how they solved their feline problem.

We have some problems to solve before us as well.

We have a responsibility for the water and the land and air.

We are stewards – caretakers – of Mother Earth.

You can read about it in the Bible if you want.

Many of the Psalms in the Bible were written by King David.

Before he was king of Israel, David was a boy shepherd.

He sang psalms and spiritual hymns to God while watching over his flock.

He appreciated God's gifts of fields and streams and providential

care.

Later, when David was King of Israel, he wrote what we know as the 23rd Psalm:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.

The 104th Psalm celebrates God's gift of creation and God's power to recreate.

O Lord, how manifold are your works!

*In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of
your creatures.*

*Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are
there,*

living things both small and great.

When you send forth your spirit, they are created;

and you renew the face of the ground.

Our souls sing hymns and psalms of thanksgiving as well.

Our souls yearn for green pastures, fresh water,

and enough so we shall not be in want.

What song would emanate from our souls if this were not the case?

What in the world are we going to do

in response to our moral responsibility to ensure

that the green pastures and fresh water
and sufficient foods we've enjoyed
continue for our children and their
children as well?

Consider this teaching from Genesis 2, the second Creation story:

“In the day that the Lord ⁵

when no plant of the field was yet in the earth

and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—

for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth,

and there was no one to till the ground;

6 but a stream would rise from the earth,

and water the whole face of the ground—

7 then the Lord God formed [humanity] from the dust of the ground,

and breathed in... the breath of life...

8 And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east;

and there God put the human whom God had formed.

*15 The Lord God ... put [the human] in the garden of Eden to till it
and keep it.”*

God plus Earth creates Humanity.

In grateful response for the gift of life,

Humanity tends the Earth and follows God.

In response for such stewardship,

Earth feeds Humanity

and as the psalmist says, “all the trees of the field clap their hands.”

You’ve heard the story of the scientist who challenged God to a creation contest.

The scientist said, “*God, I challenge you that I can make life out of dirt.*”

God said, “*I’ll take you on. You go first.*”

When the scientist reached down for a handful of soil,

God said, “*Hold on there, my friend. You have to get your own dirt.*”

From the creation of the first human beings

made by dust and breath (*ruach*) of life,

through the groundbreaking faith of Abraham and Sarah...

From the liberating work of Moses and Miriam and Aaron,

through the wisdom & hope of psalmists and prophets,

priests and people of God...

From the birth of Christ through the first 1,500 years of church history...

the triune that sparked spiritual imaginations

consisted of God, Earth, and Humanity.

These three were on the table together.

God the Creator, the Molder, the Potter, the Shepherd, the Redeemer.

Earth the land and sea made by God to nurture humanity
and for humanity to practice faithful stewardship.

Humanity, the blessed creation of God to build the kingdom of God
on earth

as it is in heaven, to till and sow and reap

blessed bounty from Mother Earth.

From Genesis to Revelation, from the Psalms to the Gospels

the Holy Scriptures point us to a loving God who loves all of
creation,

including the world and those who dance on her soil.

Alas, something happened.

In 1450 the printing press was invented in Gutenberg.

By the 1600s, over 2,500 cities had printing presses.

Literacy led to an ever greater thirst for knowledge,

the birth of science, the age of reason, and soon the industrial
revolution.

For its first 1500 years the church of Jesus Christ
taught a mighty trilogy of God, World and Humanity.

But after 1600 the song the Church sang changed.

With literacy and greater illumination
came greater self-interest and preservation.

Our spiritual ancestors began to objectify the world.

The earth and seas and trees -- and even people -- came to be seen as
resources.

Resources to be used and, if need be, abused for the building up of
humanity.

When the earth is seen as a resource and not a blessed third of a holy
trinity,

we become that much further removed
from a sense of kinship with the world.

Martin Buber might point out that we've sacrificed an *I-Thou*
relationship

for a more expedient *I-It non-relationship*.

Today is Earth Sabbath, also known as Earth Stewardship Sunday,
and we pray to be effective and responsive stewards of the
world.

The Word speaks to and for a warming world.

Effective theology engages God, Earth and Humanity.

We Disciples of Christ are not escapists, seeking how best to avoid
difficult or tricky or messy subjects or trials we find before
us.

Disciples of Christ are emboldened by the Spirit of God to rise to the
challenge,
incorporating faith and reason and spiritual discernment.

Nor do you hear Disciples of Christ advocating we take a theological
stance

or biblical interpretation that salvation is a blessed escape
from Earth.

Thank God that this is no pie in the sky religion,

one that claims that all you need do is believe

and you can effectively escape from reality

or responsibility or relationships with the rest
of creation.

Disciples of Christ are delighted to proclaim that salvation is
communal,

that in Christ we are redeemed with and alongside God's
blessed creation.

Disciples theology engages God, Earth and Humanity.

Before and during World War II

Americans rallied together to confront the twin headed monster

of political evil and economic depression.

Tom Brokaw called this “The Greatest Generation.”

We sent soldiers strong and true across the Pacific and Atlantic oceans

to defend freedom and combat fascism.

On the home front we rationed gasoline, bought war bonds,

started victory gardens, scrimped and saved to make ends meet.

Fuel and food and natural resources were needed for the war effort.

Nothing was wasted

because everything was important, valued, and essential.

Everyone pulled together; everyone did their part; we put up a united front

to save precious resources,

to save our European, Asian and African brothers and sisters,

and to save America.

No one can tell us it can't be done today; we know better.

Have you ever watched *Extreme Home Makeover*?

Want to see me cry? Change the channel to *Extreme Home*

Makeover.

By the time the community shouts “*Move that bus!*” tears of joy are flowing.

Through you and me and all of us serving together for the greater good

God is creating a new humanity to meet the present need.

When you observe and participate in the power of people coming together

to make a difference for someone other than themselves,

you are
changed. Transformed. Encouraged. Energized. Engaged.

We can do anything we invest our minds and will and resources to accomplish.

We have to decide whether something is a priority,

and everything flows from there.

So, how important to us are green pastures and fresh, still waters?

Records show that surface temperatures have risen about 1.4 degrees F

since the early 20th century and about 0.9 degrees F since 1978.

The phrase “Climate Change” is growing in preferred use to “global warming”

because it serves to convey the reality

that there are changes in addition to rising temperatures.

We see our lake water levels drop and rise and drop, and we are concerned.

Somalia has seen Lake Chad all but evaporate
and the results are alarming.

Even “Sports Illustrated” has gotten interested in climate changes. SI devoted an issue to sports and global warming (March 12, 2007), observing that as the planet changes, so do the games we play.

This is no game.

We need to talk about this, you and I, here in God’s church.

Climate change is a moral, ethical, and spiritual issue.

Climate change is becoming “a core issue for people of faith because of its effect on the poor, because of its short term and long term health impacts, and because of the threat it poses to future generations.”

(paraphrase, Karen Coshof, e-mail)

Recently many of our sister churches have come to this same conclusion,

including both progressive and fundamental congregations,
whether oriented toward social justice or evangelism

or both.

Many fellow Christians are not taking a reactive stance,

nor are they saying this is a matter for other people to figure out alone.

They are proclaiming, in effect,

that addressing social and environmental concerns

is a significant part of our vocation.

God is calling to all of us, together, to be faithful stewards of Mother Earth.

Recently I saw a Baptist church bus with their motto printed on the side:

“Exploring God’s Creation”

After 500 years of seeing the earth as a resource to be used,

churches today are reclaiming our engagement with God, Earth & Humanity.

Sixty years ago we united as a nation and a world; we know we can do so again.

There is much we can do individually and collectively.

A Georgia Tech professor explained to our school PTA

that every time we start our car engines

we use the same amount of fuel as we do to drive 25 miles.

Alexis Chase is the Executive Director of Georgia Interfaith Power and Light,

a non-profit with a mission to help churches, temples and mosques

be more energy efficient and lower energy usage and costs.

Those two go hand in hand.

Alexis Chase to her Episcopal priest, *“Father, I tithe. What are you doing*

to stop wasting my money, my tithe on gas and electric bills?”

She encourages you to ask the same question of your pastor and Church Board.

Go ahead.

Make our day.

As you may well be aware, our church is ‘going green’.

Recently Georgia Interfaith Power and Light gave us a grant of \$1,500 toward programmable thermostats.

And this spring we won the GIPL “Trailblazer Award”

for repurposing products through our Chalice Thrift store. *Go, team!*

We’re enjoying our coffee and tea with ceramic mugs instead of Styrofoam cups;

we purchased a more energy efficient stove and dishwasher;

we have replaced the roof and added insulation.

We recycle paper, glass, cans, plastic and cardboard, as well as ink cartridges,

reducing our weekly trash output by at least half;

we changed all the bulbs we can to compact florescent spirals;

we installed programmable thermostats;

and we have already seen results.

In 2009, we saved well over \$2,000 in lower energy bills.

In 2010, '11, and 12, we saved as much as \$7,000 a year in lower utility bills.

We're intentional about using our tithes for Georgia missions, not Georgia Power

Pat one another on the back for creating a park and playground.

We created a sacred green place for families to play together outdoors.

A week does not go by when someone new doesn't say to us,

"Thank you for building and sharing your Decatur Toy Park."

Growing victory gardens, intentionally using fewer fossil fuels,

recycling, reducing, reusing that which we borrow from the Earth...

are not only possible, not only are moral imperatives,

they are a matter of life and breath.

From tending and tilling in the Garden of Eden

to caring for Mother Nature in these Piedmont foothills,

our vocation is to be engaged with God, Earth and
Humanity.

The Word for a warming world is not finished.

The first climate that must be changed is within us.

God is creating a new humanity to meet the present need.

This is the new beginning that is borne of the Holy Spirit,

a global resurrection with its genesis in an authentic
humanity.

We begin afresh our congregation, our dialogue, our community
action,

our spiritual growth,

our igniting of spirit-fed passion

for the very survival and healing

of this blue planet spinning in the sky.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy
Spirit. Amen!*

EXTRA MATERIAL:

In May 2001, President Bush and the White House

asked the National Academy of Sciences

to assess our current understanding of climate change.

The resulting study by the National Academy of Sciences

offered independent, objective advice

on the issues related to climate change.

The report to the White House concluded that

“changes observed over the last several decades

are likely mostly due to human activities”

with some contribution from natural variability.”

(“Understanding and Responding to Climate Change: Highlights of National Academies Reports”, page 5)

“The report states that a growing body of evidence

indicates that Earth's atmosphere is warming.

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since the early 20th century and about 0.9 degrees F since 1978." (p. 1)

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"How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives." --Annie
Dillard