

“Completing Creation”

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Trinity, Year A, Revised Common Lectionary

Rev. David Denoon
First Congregational Church
Evanston, Illinois

Readings

Genesis 1:1–2:4a; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13:11–13; Matthew 28:16–20

To conserve water, take no more than four minutes for a shower.

For the sake of lower emissions and higher gas mileage, if your battery and starter can take it, when you know you will be sitting in traffic for more than seven seconds, turn off your car’s engine. The amount of gasoline necessary to start a fuel-injected vehicle is approximately equal to that used for seven seconds of idling. Alternatively, use public transportation or get to work on your own steam.

Don’t just turn off your electronic devices with infra-red and radio sensors or battery-chargers, unplug them.

To keep from using herbicides and pesticides on your lawn and to eliminate watering, allow your grass to grow to at least four inches before cutting, and then cut no lower than two and a half inches with a non-motorized, rotary-blade mower, leaving the clippings where they fall.

Grow your own vegetables and herbs, turning, breaking and cultivating the soil with hand tools, or using patio pots creatively.

Learn to compost.

Prepare meals at home, and eat out less. Make your snacks from scratch.

Reuse your grocery bags. Better yet, buy canvas ones and figure out a way to avoid all the plastic and paper containers. And use less stuff that comes in disposable containers.

Buy second-hand.

Learn to do simple repairs.

Take time for other people: to talk and listen (and get more advice). Pay attention in the moment.

Practice a Sabbath day.

These are just a few pieces of advice I have tried to take to heart, with an eye toward being ecologically minded. I try to follow as many as I can, but I’ll admit that it’s been hard in this transition time.

Something interesting about these bits of advice is that all of them end up slowing you down. Following any or all of them, I have to surrender whatever rapid pace of living my

society is telling me is required.

It all can seem rather anachronistic. But maybe we need to come to be OK with that. These ways are leading me to a new understanding of stewardship, maybe just stewardliness. I have a book one of you has loaned me called, rather straightforwardly, *Serve God, Save the Planet*. Its author, J. Matthew Sleeth, who is a medical doctor and an evangelical Christian, offers advice for creating a smaller carbon footprint – in fact, a smaller footprint generally... he talks about his four-person family moving from a palatial home to a comparatively tiny house, getting rid of half their possessions in the process, and foregoing what most of us would consider necessities but he considers to be mere conveniences:

“Although I believed in the “environmental cause” before I accepted Christ as my Savior, my belief did not translate into action,” Dr. Sleeth writes. “[Then], I went through a process of examining my life, and I found it was filled with sin and hypocrisy. I decided to conduct an assessment and figure out a rough estimate of the actual environmental impact by my family. This honest inventory indicated what the Christian faith required of me... Because of these changes, we have more time for God.”

Dr. Sleeth’s daughter Emma has recently published her own book about being a teenager as her parents adopted a more ecologically friendly lifestyle, entitled (believe it or not), *It’s Easy Being Green*.

Another person with a similar focus was Doris Jantzen Longacre, a Mennonite author who in the 1970s and 80s came out with a

series of books, all with the phrase *Living More with Less* in the title. In each, she offered simple ideas in order to adopt a mentality and attitude of encountering the world as fully and completely as possible. It was an article of faith for her, as you might imagine it would be for a Mennonite, even one like Longacre who lived and dwelt in a contemporary, urban setting rather than in an encampment in the countryside.

Longacre offered ideas for simple meals, inspirations for gatherings, recipes for numerous household cleaners, which either needed no spray bottles or could be put safely in reusable sprayers, suggestions for using cloths and rags instead of paper towels, and a wide variety of other practices to make life simpler... or, as I have discovered, *not simpler, but more basic*.

The idea, here, is that the more personally invested you are in an activity, the more likely you will have an encounter with the world as it is. And the more likely your encounter with the world as it is, the more chance there is that you will be coming into contact with other human beings as they are. Not only will *this* opportunity enhance your abilities for problem-solving and interpersonal relations, but you will very likely be saddled with a consideration of just where God is, or what God might want for a given moment.

And that is our big question, no matter what we may be doing in any given moment, isn't it. That is the big question for Christians trying to be faithful: *What does God want?*

It's the reason most of us Christians worship on Sunday, rather than on Saturday. At the very least, it's the likely reason Jesus was raised on Sunday, rather than on Saturday. Saturday is the Sabbath, God's day of rest.

Jesus rested in the tomb. The Lord rested... well, wherever God might rest from all the work of the previous six days of creation.

But on Sunday, God is up again, working, completing creation. And we, God's stewards upon the earth according to that first (comparatively long) story in Genesis, need to be attuned to God's will so that we may be about our Creator's business. *What does God want?*

God wants creation to be complete.

Not necessarily *finished*, but complete... whole... full... good.

It was full once, the author of the second story in Genesis argues, that story about Adam and Eve and the Serpent in the Garden.

The first story says that God spent seven

days, taking creation from void to fullness. The second story says that humanity ruined that fullness by becoming ignorant of God's will, unfaithful, and sinful.

The concluding verses of Matthew, which we also heard today, indicate the worldwide-ness of God's intentions for the spreading of good news: that a return of

the earth to its original fullness, completeness, blessedness is possible. "Go into all the world," Jesus instructs his apostles, "and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them..."

With Christ's words, Matthew seems to argue that humanity can have no hope of completing their role as earth's stewards, if the overwhelming majority of human beings have no knowledge of Who is in charge, and of what God's expectations are.

What Matthew (and Luke and Mark and John) did, was to acknowledge through tales of the words and actions of Jesus, that God had in the Messiah fulfilled what was lacking in creation. God revealed that things have gone to far in humans' death-dealing, that the

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new and just way is that of reconciliation, between heaven and earth, between divine and human, between human and human, and between human and creation. Creation now is potentially whole because God has acted; all that remains is for humanity to hear, understand, and acknowledge that God has embraced us and empowered us to fulfill our role in creation.

Dr. Sleeth points out in his book that the English word “dominion,” in reference to our assignment as stewards, in Genesis 1 and Psalm 8, is a rather poor translation for a Hebrew word which implies our existence in creation as if we were the highest part of a tree, figuratively watching over creation because we are its crown, not because the rest of the tree is inferior. We are not God but the image of God, not the Governor, but the stewards... not in control but administrators of the One who is.

“Go into the world and make disciples of all nations,” is the risen Christ’s injunction upon the apostles at the end of the gospel according to Matthew. Discipleship is action, it is seeking the will of God, and it is constantly pursuing the answer to the question,

Discipleship is action, it is seeking the will of God, and it is constantly pursuing the answer to the question, *What does God want?* And it is finding in the answer, how best we may fulfill our role in creation... as reconcilers and healers of, and in, our world.

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I’m not saying that you have to be Christian in order to be ecologically minded or environmentally conscious. In fact, on the whole, our track record is miserable. But I am

saying that the fact that you are Christian, that I am Christian, ought to help motivate our stewardship, or at least our stewardliness! It just makes sense: You know that God has accepted you, gotten you on the road of forgiveness and reconciliation, wants you to be your best *you*.

Some of that you can do by following the advice I offered at the beginning of this talk. Some of it, by living simply, by demanding less of the world and putting more back in it, so that others may simply live.

We are the stewards of creation, the creatures who are commissioned also to be caregivers and caretakers. Let us discover anew this word from God we have heard and explored today, for the sake of a future we and new generations of humanity can live with.

Amen.