

Stewardship of the Earth
Genesis 1:29-31, Psalm 24:1-2, John 10:10b
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“God saw everything that God had made, and indeed it was very good.”

“I sing the almighty power of God, that made the mountains rise, that spread the flowing seas abroad, and built the lofty skies. I sing the wisdom that ordained the sun to rule the day; the moon shines full at God’s command, and all the stars obey.”

“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it.”

“There’s not a plant or flower below, but makes thy glories known, and clouds arise, and tempest blow, by order from thy throne; while all that borrows life from thee is ever in thy care; and everywhere that we can be, thou, God, are present there.”

Much of our understanding of our faith comes to us from scripture and hymns. The last scripture that was read today was Jesus words: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

About whom do you suppose Jesus was speaking? I’m hoping I was included in that “they.” I’m hoping that you are. What I suspect is that Jesus was talking about all of us who inhabit the planet Earth: The Earth which was created by God and indeed belongs to God.

I believe that it is God’s will for everyone on the planet to have abundant life and that that is possible when we care for the planet.

When I was growing up in the Methodist Church one of the concepts that was taught was stewardship. In those days when we had stewardship Sunday, it had nothing to do with the finance campaign. It was all about understanding ourselves as Christians and children of God to be stewards of God’s creation. We were taught that nothing really belonged to us, but rather that everything belonged to God and was entrusted to us for our care.

You may remember this fall that the church council voted for St. John to be in a covenant relationship with Alaska Interfaith Power & Light which is according to this cover letter “a faith-based organization, mobilizing a religious voice on climate change, while deepening the connection between Creation and faith.” This decision was not made without some discussion and just a touch of controversy.

Some wondered why our church would be involved in what appears on the surface to be a political or at least a secular issue. Why indeed? As people of faith, we are stewards of God’s creation.

I was encouraged when ten people signed up to learn more about this ministry possibility; ten persons have attended meetings—and you are invited to the next one which is on St. Patrick’s Day at 6:30--, and thirteen persons have expressed interest in a printed resource to help us reduce our carbon footprint. Most encouraging though as been the attitude of the persons on the task force. First, they changed the name of the task force to more clearly reflect their identity and purpose. It’s not so much about climate change and saving energy as about being good stewards of the earth, so the task force is now called Earth Stewardship. While clearly hoping to find ways for us both as a congregation and as individuals to take some actions to make a positive difference environmentally, the emphasis has been on making sure our response is from a Christian perspective

—not just as good citizens of the planet, not that there's anything wrong with that, but rather as people of faith.

Before we launched into any programs or activities, it was important to the task force that the first action was to have a worship service with this message: The earth is the Lord's, everyone on the planet is our neighbor, and we have a Christian responsibility to God and to our neighbor to care for the planet.

Not just care in the sense of having positive feelings, but in the sense of taking care of, being responsible for, the well-being of the planet.

In the early 70's, I was an active member of the League of Women Voters—I wasn't yet 30 but I still remember the statistic that we in North America with 6% of the population used 45% of the world's resources. Frankly, now nearly 40 years later, I have no idea about the current statistic, but my guess is it is still as disproportionate if not more so. As Christians we accept Jesus' teaching that the greatest commandment is to love God and the second is like it—to love our neighbor. And just who is our neighbor?

If you recall, that was the occasion for Jesus to tell the story of the Good Samaritan. He was responding to a lawyer asking him to define neighbor. The quick answer is: our neighbor is anyone in need.

I suspect that means persons who don't have clean water or air or enough food, clothing, or shelter because we are using more than our share of the world's resources.

One of my favorite children's books, *The Temper Tantrum Book*, explains why Persnickety Pig is whining when he didn't get the biggest piece of pie. His explanation makes perfect sense to me: "I should get the most because I like it the most." I've been looking for years to work that line into a sermon and it's one that makes the point without elaboration. Again, our neighbors are persons who don't have clean water or air or enough food, clothing, or shelter in part because we are using more than our share of the world's resources.

Some have asked if the United Methodist Church has a position on this issue. I'm glad you asked—timing is everything.

Dave invites you to participate in the class that is coming up on the United Methodist Social Principles. Under the category *The Natural World* we read: "All creation is the Lord's and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it. Water, air, soil, minerals, energy resources, plants, animal life, and space are to be valued and conserved because they are God's creation and not solely because they are useful to human beings. God has granted us stewardship of creation. We should meet these stewardship duties through acts of loving care and respect."

With the approach of General Conference, the denomination has published this little book called *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living*, written by Reuben Job based on teachings of John Wesley. The rules are: first, do no harm, second, do good, and third, stay in love with God. Three simple rules. When we think of ourselves as stewards of God's Creation, those rules are good to keep in mind:

do no harm—the earth is the Lord's; do good—everyone on the planet is our neighbor; and stay in love with God—we have a responsibility as Christians to care for the planet.

As a person with free will given to me by the Creator God, I can choose to live by the Three Simple Rules and all they imply or I can choose the other exalting way: that of Persnickety Pig. The choice is mine.

“As each far horizon beckons, may it challenge us anew, children of creative purpose, serving others, honoring you. May our dreams prove rich with promise, each endeavor well begun. Great Creator, give us guidance till our goals and yours are one.”