

Creation Care as Justice Sunday, 5/17/20

[OFF] The last several weeks we've taken a deliberately gentle journey through our worship theme of caring for God's creation. Instead of hitting you hard with messages of environmental sin and eco-justice, we made a beginning with the most important, foundational truths that must be the source of all true acts of justice: That God made everything and called everything good; that the purpose of God's creation is to bear witness to the goodness and glory of God; and that our identity and purpose is rooted in the role God first gave us as caretakers of the garden of earth, and everything in it. In other words, our motivation as caretakers of creation isn't simply one of self-interest, although it certainly is in our best interest to care for creation. It isn't simply a matter of pragmatism, although there are many pragmatic reasons to care for creation. It isn't even simply a matter of human justice, but rather a matter of God's justice. Advancing God's justice in this world is an important way that we participate in witnessing the goodness and glory of God, and a tangible way that we take action to accomplish what we pray for: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

[SHARE: Three rings: Ecology, Justice, Faith] Here's another way to think of it, since I've found that eco-justice seems to mean so many different things to different people. Eco-justice is more than understanding the way life is interconnected and how our actions and inactions change the rhythms of life on this planet. That's ecology. Eco-justice is more than understanding how some people, animals, plants, and lands suffer disproportionate harm or have unfairly limited access to resources and a climate that promotes health and growth. That's justice. Eco-justice is more than praising God for the goodness of creation and proclaiming that we are God's stewards of the planet. That's faith. Eco-justice is the intersection of all three of these things. We find the present and future Kingdom of God in that sweet spot of the intersection of all three, where our faith propels us to better understand and more wisely act in the web of life, with special attention to caring for those who are disproportionately harmed by ecological imbalances.

[OFF] I can't help it- I'm a systems thinker, and I really need a conceptual framework to organize my thoughts and motivate and guide my actions. I hope that helps you in some way, too. It's a much healthier foundation for changing our habits and our world than guilt,

isn't it? And yet it seems that guilt is the feeling we all have when we reflect on eco-justice issues. Perhaps that's because we all sense that we could be doing more than we are to care for our planet. **{Lift up and show bag of batteries}** For example, while we might be conscientious about saving depleted batteries for recycling, most of us fail to take the next step of reducing our use of batteries or substituting rechargeable batteries. **{Set down batteries}** We'll circle back to that guilt issue next week when we look at the environmental impact of our sin, but for today we'll focus on challenging ourselves to grow in our intentional and active participation in bringing greater eco-justice into this world.

[SHARE: Flint/Detroit Road Sign] The Prophet Isaiah offers this clear call to justice in the 58th chapter. I'm reading from The Message **{Read Isaiah 58:6-14 (The Message)}**

[OFF] Tragically, Flint, Michigan is currently a poster city in the United States for eco-justice. Six years after the cities' ill-fated decision to switch their clean water supply to the Flint River lead to a large-scale lead contamination, some residents still don't have clean drinking water.¹ Imagine trying to stay safe at home during this pandemic with access to clean water for handwashing, drinking, cooking, and bathing! And yet millions in America are in that situation, in Flint and around the country. One study indicates that about 45 million Americans are using water that fails to meet current health standards² and that it's the poor, immigrants, and racial minorities who are disproportionately affected.

Internationally, access to clean water is even more dire, with the CDC estimating that 780 million people don't even have access to an improved water source³ (that is, they rely solely on water directly from lakes, rivers, and rainfall). Honestly, those kinds of numbers are overwhelming, but that doesn't mean there's nothing we can do to make a difference. Our faith can lead us to make wise and fair choices in how we live with the water in our lives.

[SHARE: Water in Hand] Water conservation is a simple starting point. Think for a moment how many times a day your hand reaches out and uses water: Toilet flushes, watering hoses, lawn sprinklers, car washes, drinking glasses, cooking, bathing, tooth brushing, washing clothing, dish washing. Simple things like reusing a water glass and not

¹ <https://www.clickondetroit.com/consumer/help-me-hank/2020/04/24/6-years-later-where-things-stand-in-the-flint-water-crisis/>

² <https://www.vox.com/identities/2020/4/17/21223565/coronavirus-clean-water-crisis-america>

³ https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/global/wash_statistics.html

filling it with more water than you need are easy things that most people could do today. Beyond conservation, our use of sidewalk salt, lawn fertilizer, and pesticides are destroying the water in our lakes and rivers. Reducing their use or finding organic substitutes is another avenue for you to make concrete contributions to the just use of clean water. And remember, these things aren't just for self-interest and pragmatism, they're for our witness to the goodness and glory of God.

[OFF] Along with clean water, our relationship with food- how it is produced, distributed, consumed, and disposed of- contains a whole constellation of eco-justice issues. The United Methodist General Board of Church and Society offers these startling facts⁴:

- In the United States, restaurant workers are twice as likely as the general population to be food insecure.
- 80 Million children worldwide aged 5-14 are employed as child laborers in agriculture.
- Agricultural production accounts for 70% of the world's freshwater use.
- One in nine people worldwide, approximately 795 million living souls, do not have access to sufficient food to live a healthy life.
- Each year, one-third of all food produced globally for human consumption, roughly 1.3 billion tons of food, is wasted.

Back before there were internet memes or even an internet, the social equivalent of a food injustice meme would have been the mother scolding the children at the dinner table for not cleaning their plates. If you're over fifty, you know what mom is saying, right? "There are children starving in China, so I want to see you eat every last thing on your plate!" Clearly, that was a not-so-well informed appeal to guilt. But the good news is that there are ways for us to engage in food justice that are both positive and honor our mission of bearing witness to the goodness and glory of God.

[SHARE: Vegetable Garden] I'm not much of a vegetable gardener myself. I find that tending our trees, bushes, and lawn keep me plenty busy. But there does seem to be a renaissance of raised bed vegetable gardens in the neighborhood I live in. Raising your own vegetables and herbs can reduce your carbon footprint as well as allow you to decide on the

⁴ Faith and Facts: Environmental Justice. <https://www.umcjustice.org>

most just use of watering and fertilizing practices. And even though I'm not currently raising my own food, as I mentioned last week, there is something very satisfying about connecting with the land by getting your hands into the dirt. Our BUMC Earth Keepers group suggests you consider these ideas as well:

- Plan nutritious meals together with your family, becoming aware of how to generate less food waste
- Buy from local farmers such as farmers' markets or join a Community Supported Agriculture group
- Learn more about hunger and food insecurity in the community you live in, our country, and our world
- Support your local food shelf

The General Board of Church and Society offers this final word of encouragement:

By being intentional about how we care for the environment in our kitchens, we can learn to pray and eat in solidarity with our neighbors, both locally and globally, who do not have access to the nutrition they need. We might even be able to lessen the gap in food scarcity that we see in the USA and all over the world.

[OFF] Clean water, adequate and safe food, clean air, climate change, land zoning- there are more potential conversation topics and action points in eco-justice than there are days in a year. That can feel overwhelming, and the temptation we face is to just shut down, either pretending that the injustices that don't immediately affect us don't exist, or believing the lie that the problems are too big for any one of us to make a difference. The problems are big, and we really do need to take actions as entire communities to make the biggest, most sustainable impacts. But every change, every righting of an environmental injustice, begins with someone stopping and noticing a disconnect between God's vision for creation and the tangled mess we've made in caring for it. We really can be the change, but the "we" starts with a commitment by the "I"- not out of guilt or expediency, but to faithfully witness to the goodness and the glory of our creator.

[SHARE: Reflection Slide] Please take some time now to reflect on how you will work for justice in creation care. If you like, you can share a comment or a prayer on Facebook.



Bill Reinhart, Pastor
pastorbill@buffaloumc.com