

“STEWARDS OF CREATION”
(Genesis 1:26-30)
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[PROP NEEDED: Video Clip from Disney movie “Wall-E”]
[East Cobb U.M.C.; 6-26-11]

-I-

1. **[Traditional Service ONLY]** Read Text: Genesis 1:16-30 and Pray.

2. **[WATCH VIDEO FROM WALL-E** (3:41 - 4:33, Time: 0:52)]

A—What kind of world will we leave to our children and grandchildren? Will it be the beautiful world in which we live and enjoy today? Or... something less – like the world of ugliness we just saw in the movie Wall-E?

B—You know, it’s scenes like those that have encouraged many people in recent years to think about the state of our natural world, and begin to take steps to ensure that we do, indeed, pass on the beauty and resources of the world we now enjoy.

C—And perhaps because of that, these days “*Going Green*” is all the rage!

1—We hear about it in everything from hybrid cars, to organic foods; from energy-efficient appliances to recyclable printer cartridges, ...

2—...From weekly curbside collections that separate trash from recycle products, to fast food chains who’re reducing their use of plastic, and increasing their use of recycled materials,...

3—...From hotels that encourage the reuse of towels and bed-linens, to light bulbs that can last as much as ten times longer than traditional ones.

4—And some of you may have noticed that it’s even in the theme of our children’s Sunday School curriculum this summer.

3. Now, all of this interest in “going green” has happened so fast that some people think it’s a *new* idea.

A—But though it may have become more popular and prominent in recent years, the origins of environmental care are actually quite ancient.

B—They reach back to the beginnings of humanity, and in fact are deeply rooted in our own Christian faith and theology.

1—For example, did you know that while our Bible contains nearly 500 references to “heaven”, and *over* 500 references to “love”, it contains over *1000* references to the earth and its care? ¹

2—Obviously, it's writers wanted us to understand that caring for the earth and the life on it is as much a part of our faith as are those other subjects.

C—Today's scripture from Genesis 1 is actually one such example.

[(Contemp. Service ONLY:) Listen as I read it... (read Genesis 1:26-30, MSG)...]

4. The key to this whole passage is Verse 26, which again says...

(MSG) *“God spoke: let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.”*

(NRSV) *“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.’”*

A—Now, we find here what some people have called the “*Dominion Mandate*,” referring to the “dominion” that some translations say God gave humans to have over earth and the created order (i.e., the “*fish of the sea, birds of the air, the cattle and wild animals...*”).

B—And yet, the word often translated as “*dominion*” (Hebrew *radah* ²) does not really refer to an absolute right of subjugation and rule, like we often mean when we use that term (i.e., that we can just “do whatever we want” to whatever it is we’re given “dominion” over).

C—Instead, *radah* more accurately simply means “**Responsibility**” or “**Stewardship**” – that is: “*having responsibility for / being a steward of*” something, or “*being responsible to take care of*” something (reflected in MSG version) – which is why others refer to this verse not as the “*Dominion*” mandate but simply as the “*Stewardship*” mandate. ³

5. My point is that environmentalism at its heart is not some exercise in political correctness, perpetrated by a liberal, left-wing social agenda (like some people think).

A—No. It's in fact an actual mandate *from God Himself* – a part of His agreement with humanity when we were placed on the earth in the first place.

1—It's an agreement in which God essentially says, “*I'll give you authority over the earth and its creatures, to use and appropriate its resources to meet your needs. But in return, I ask that you be good stewards of those resources – to take care of the earth on my behalf; to use its resources in such a way that it can continually replenish itself, to be passed on to future generations.*”

2—Christian author Peter Harris says that “*Creation theology is not a Christian attempt to 'save the planet.' It is [instead] a response to WHO God IS.*” ⁴

B–Now, that’s a very different motivation for environmental care than what we see and hear about in the secular world that’s all around us.

1–...Which is why John Wesley (the founder of Methodism) believed that our care of creation as humans is an essential part of the full, biblical meaning of “salvation.”

2–For him, to be truly “saved” means that we are set right with *God*, set right with *ourselves*, set right with *other humans*, AND set right with *the created world* around us—he believed, you see, that “salvation” has both a personal *and* a social dimension that *includes* the created order⁵ – and we do indeed find that in today’s scripture

–II–

6. So, if biblical salvation includes humans “being responsible” for taking care of God’s world, then what does that look like in practice? What does it mean (in the words of today’s title) to be “Stewards of Creation”?

A–Well, there’s a lot of things that could be said here, but let me frame it by saying that the gist of it is that we’re to understand our use & appropriation of the materials and resources resources *of* the earth – and our interaction with other life here *on* earth – as being *caretakers*, rather than *consumers*.⁶

1–A “*caretaker*” does just what that word implies: “*takes care*” of something on behalf of *someone else*; And because they understand that what they’re looking after doesn’t belong to them, they’re more careful not to misuse it, lest they incur the wrath of the owner.

2–A “*consumer*,” on the other hand, presumes that what they’re in possession of is wholly/completely theirs to use and dispose of as they see fit; and therefore, they answer to no one about their actions or behaviors in regard to those possessions.

B–So with that distinction in mind, let me say it again... the Bible says we’re to be *caretakers* of our world, NOT *consumers* – which one are you in how you treat the material and living resources entrusted to your care?

7. In her book Green Church, Rebekah Simon-Peter actually sets forth six principles that I think can be very helpful in keeping us focused on being a steward/caretaker, and keep us clear of consumerism in our care for God’s creation:⁷

A–First, she says that we need to **Repent** of the various ways in which we as humans have failed to be good stewards of God’s creation.

The signs of this failure are all around us... from air and water pollution, to the possibility of global warming due to spiraling CO₂ emissions, to the increased extinctions of animal and plant species – you see, without realizing, we are DE-creating the world that God gave us... and we need to repent!

B–But then, we also need to **Reclaim** our God-given role as *stewards* of creation – to recognize that the mandate of Genesis 1:26 is a call for us to begin to once more responsibly *take care of creation*, rather than selfishly use it up – and to be intentional about that care (not haphazard, but to make it a priority in our lifestyle and behavior)! ⁸

C–And one way we can do that is (third) to **Reduce** our use of products and habits that may be harmful to our environment (or at least may help extend it for future generations) –

Maybe we can reduce our water use by taking shorter showers, or turning off the faucet when brushing our teeth or washing dishes, or installing low-flow toilets; OR we can car pool, or walk, or ride a bike more often to reduce our use of and dependence on gas; OR we can reduce energy consumption by cutting back our thermostat, using more efficient appliances, & by turning off lights, computers & other electronics we’re not using; AND at church, we’ve already reduced paper waste by providing our newsletter, and e-giving, and various other resources *online* (and more of these will be coming later this year as we totally redesign our website).

D–A fourth suggestion is to **Reuse** more things – instead of throwing things away that still have use in them and buying the newest, coolest “stuff,” use the “old” thing a little longer!

I prepared this sermon on a laptop computer that’s now 8 years old (a dinosaur!). And it’s true I now got a new iPhone, but I waited *3 years* ‘til my old basically *died* before I got it! Another example: *print* on the back-side of your scrap paper instead of throwing it away (I do that); OR at the very least, do what Nancy does in our church office... cut your scrap paper up and make it into post-it notes that people can use.

E–A fifth principle is to **Recycle** – to learn the benefits of turning one thing into another!

Many of us already have a recycle bin at home for newspapers, bottles, cans and even glass. Some people do composting as a way of recycling the nutrients of fruits & vegetables. And did you know that each week here at church we recycle all the worship bulletins that are leftover, and we also recycle paper in a bin in the office? Recycle more.

F–Well, in her book Rebekah Simon-Peter says that the doing of these other things allows us to do a sixth and final very important thing... to **Rejoice!** – to affirm our faith in God’s promises to us, and to celebrate our role as co-creators *with Him* in our world!

8. Of course, there are a variety of additional ways we can care for God’s creation, ⁹ but my prayer is that these six simple principles will simply get us thinking about being more intentional, for when we learn to become good “*Stewards of [God’s] Creation*,” then we will have begun to reflect more of *His* glory and Lordship in *our* lives!

9. [PRAYER: “*You have created us in your image to bless and care for all that you have made.... O God, we ask your forgiveness for our blind focus upon only one species (our own), for the times we have failed to think of the harm done to other life, and for our reckless plundering and waste of so much that has value that we do not yet perceive.... Help us instead to reclaim a right relationship with your whole creation, that the earth might thrive with the abundance you intended. Open our eyes to the beauty that is around us; and help us to be faithful stewards of all your good gifts, being mindful not only of ourselves but of all your creatures and of those who will come after us. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, Amen.*”

(–Prayer taken from two prayers by Donn Kesselheim and Rev. Tim Trippel, cited in Pamela Dilmore and Rebekah Simon-Peter, Green Church (Leader Guide) (Abingdon, 2010), pp. 38 and 48)]

10. [HOLY COMMUNION]

ENDNOTES:

1. Rebekah Simon-Peter, Green Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), p. 1.
2. Word #H7287, Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible
3. For example, read Joseph Coleson, ed., Care of Creation: Christian Voices on God, Humanity and the Environment (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2010), pp. 24-25. Read also "Deconstructing Dominion," in Rebekah Simon-Peter, Green Church, pp. 27-28.
4. Peter Harris, cited in Christianity Today magazine (June 2011), p.31.
5. For two examples of this thought, read two of his sermons: "The General Deliverance" in The Works of John Wesley (Volume 6, Sermon 60, pp. 241-252); and "The New Creation" in Works (Volume 6, Sermon 64, pp. 288-296). For another example of this concept, read Christopher T. Bounds, "God's Ongoing Redemption of All Creation" in Coleson, ed., Care of Creation (Chapter 3), pp. 47-59.
6. For example, read Richard L. Daake and D. Darek Jarmola, "Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources," in Coleson, ed., Care of Creation (Chapter 9), pp. 139-151.
7. These six are taken generally from Rebekah Simon-Peter, Green Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), pp. 7-107.
8. In the "Reclaim" chapter of her book, Simon-Peter says "*I think it is time for all of us to get back out into creation, to be restored and reclaimed, and to reclaim our rightful role as stewards of creation. So plant a garden. Take a walk. Swim with the beavers. Take a child outside. Exult in the creation. While you are out there, pay attention. Listen. Watch. Breathe deeply. Read the Bible outdoors. Pray for the creation. Let the Spirit speak to you about how you might use your God-given talents to bring order out of chaos in your neck of the woods*" (Simon-Peter, p. 39).
9. For several excellent resources for ideas and support for better creation care within the context of Christian faith, read the following books: Nancy Sleeth, Go Green, Save Green: A Simple Guide to Saving Time, Money, and God's Green Earth (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2009); Rebekah Simon-Peter, 7 Simple Steps to Green Your Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010); The Green Bible (HarperOne, 2008). Also review the following websites: www.creationcare.org; www.arocha.org; www.thedailygreen.com; www.servegodsavetheplanet.org; <http://theregenerationproject.org>