

**Run, Spectate, or Commit**  
(Genesis 1:27-31 and Mathew 25:31-46)

It's not easy being green! Did Kermit the Frog and his "green" song bring back any memories? It's not easy being green! That was Kermit's lament as he tried to communicate just how hard a frog's life really is. It's not easy being green. Since Kermit rose to the top of the popularity list of all things green, the color has taken on new meaning. Today, Kermit in his greenness would probably identify with the environmental movement around the world.

And it is a "movement" much in the same way early Methodism in England was a movement. The Wesley's movement was intended to reform the Church of England which had become complacent in its care for the broad spectrum of the people it was to serve – the poor and marginalized as well as the wealthy and privileged. Similarly, the environmental movement is intended to reform a society that has become complacent in its use and abuse of God's Creation. Please pray with me.

Creator God, you have blessed us in many ways with the fruits of your Creation. At the same time you have given us great responsibility for using those fruits wisely. Open our hearts and minds to the scripture read and your word proclaimed. Renew us in all the Earth and guide us in renewing our commitment to be stewards of

your blessings. In Jesus who is the Christ we pray. Amen.

Perhaps one of the earliest stories we learned in Sunday school as young children is the story of the Creation. In the first chapter of Genesis we were taught that God created all things. As children the Creation Story made sense to most of us. It wasn't until we got older that we entered into the time-weary debate of evolution versus creationism. Terms like intelligent design had yet to come into our world.

The Creation Story goes beyond illuminating God's role as the Creator of the Universe. In the Old Testament reading this morning God addresses the man and woman he has created. God instructs them to "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground." [Genesis 1:28 *NLT*] That reading was from the *New Living Translation*.

The *New International Version* translates that passage in a more proactive way. God says, "Be fruitful and increase in number; *fill* the earth and *subdue it*. *Rule over* the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." [Genesis 1:28 *NIV*] God instructs our forbearers to "fill the earth and subdue it ... [to] rule over ... every living creature ..."

Regardless of which translation you favor, Genesis 1:28 is a mandate

for humankind to fill the earth, to subdue it, to rule over it. There are at least two kinds of rulers in the world. There are good rulers who care about their constituents. And then there are bad rulers who put their own needs over the needs of their constituents. Which kind of ruler do you think God intends for us to be?

Fill the earth and subdue doesn't mean use it up and abuse it. That was never God's intention. Genesis 1:28 is God's charge to us to be stewards and not just rulers. One dictionary definition of *steward* is "a person who manages another's property or financial affairs; one who administers anything as the agent of another or others."<sup>1</sup> The meaning of Genesis 1:28 is clear. As recipients of God's gracious blessing in all the Earth, we are also benefactors. We benefit from those blessings. We are also called to be stewards of those blessings. God has entrusted us to care for the Earth and all that is in it. We are stewards of our environment. Using the words from a Charles Wesley hymn, this is a charge we have to keep.

This past week we observed, if not celebrated, the thirty-ninth anniversary of Earth Day. The first Earth Day was instituted on April 22, 1970. For perhaps the first time in the history of the world the topic of environmental stewardship took center stage, if only for a brief period of time.

For those of you who are old enough to have been around in 1970, what do you remember about the first Earth Day? What I remember is the *Whole Earth Catalogue*. The *Whole Earth Catalogue* was first published in 1968 and it's still around today. It has become something of a guide for those

who are concerned about caring for the environment. It's a collection of articles, publications, items, and equipment designed to help people return to a simpler way of life. The ideology behind the *Whole Earth Catalogue* was that a simpler lifestyle equates to an environmentally friendly lifestyle.

The *Whole Earth Catalogue* aside, has our lifestyle become simpler since that first Earth Day? The rapid rise of digital technology over these past 39 years has made our lives more convenient. Technology has shrunk an already-shrinking world to the point that we are more connected as human beings now than we have ever been. While that technology has connected us in ways most of us could have never imagined; while technology has made our lives more convenient; technology has not made our lives more simple.

In fact, our lives have become more complicated as we continually strive to stay current with the latest developments in communications, entertainment, travel, and leisure time – not to mention the latest developments in the business and scientific communities. Even the church has been influenced by the technological revolution of the past 39 years as we compete in a post-modern world that sees the church in a different set of eyes than we are accustomed to.

Whether or not a simpler lifestyle leads to an environmentally friendly lifestyle the time has come for us to pay closer attention to our charge to be good stewards of the Earth. For the first time in the history of the world, we must confront the reality that the resources of the Earth are not without limits. And unless we believe that God intended for us to exhaust those resources we need

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<sup>1</sup> *Webster's College Dictionary* (copyright © 1995, 1992, 1991 by Random House, Inc.) page 1312

to work harder to preserve and sustain them.

Kermit the Frog speaks volumes when he says, "It's not easy being green." It's not easy for us to change the way we have become accustomed to living on this planet. It requires that we make a commitment to leading a sustainable lifestyle. I know in my own personal life that commitment is not easy. It's always easier to take the short cuts. It's more convenient to drive to the church instead of walking.

And even when we are more committed, we still err on the side of convenience. In the March 2009 edition of *National Geographic* there is a story about a family who decided to commit to reducing their carbon footprint. Carbon footprint is a term that expresses the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> that is released into the environment through the use various energy sources. CO<sub>2</sub> is a major contributor to the so-called greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming.

After weeks of energy sacrifices the family had cut its carbon footprint in half. The family of four then flew from Virginia to Oregon to attend the wedding of a niece. When the energy consumption for this trip was factored into their experiment, they had more than doubled their carbon footprint.<sup>2</sup> This illustrates the degree of commitment required to make a significant contribution to the environment. The degree of difficulty required to become committed to the stewardship of God's Creation reminds me of another story.

*The City of Joy* is a film that tells the story of a young doctor and a British nurse who together transform a ghetto

in Calcutta. Patrick Swayze plays Max Lowe, a disillusioned surgeon who travels to India after a young patient dies on his operating table. But Lowe's determination to quit medicine is challenged when he meets Joan, a committed nurse who runs a free clinic in Calcutta's most dangerous neighborhood. She needs a doctor so she sets out to convince Dr. Max to not give up his career in medicine, but to help her to care for the indigent of Calcutta. Joan challenges Max when she tells him, "In life a person really has only three choices ... to run, to spectate, or to commit." Eventually, Dr. Max meets the challenge and teaches the impoverished people the strength of their own unity.

Run, spectate, or commit! Those are our choices when it comes to protecting the environment and sustaining God's gift of Creation. We can run by convincing ourselves that there is no problem. We can also become spectators, sitting idly by while others take responsibility for protecting the environment. To spectate is a safe, middle ground position. Spectators don't aggravate a situation, but at the same time, they do nothing to make it better. Or we can commit – commit to changing the way we live.

I am not going to presume to tell you what to do to make that commitment. First of all, it's up to each of us as individuals to decide just how we can contribute. The story from *National Geographic* illustrates that all measures need to be evaluated and weighed against our priorities. We need to be aware of the many and varied steps that can be appropriately taken to lessen our affect on planet Earth. Our Green Disciples group is endeavoring to help us with some of those decisions. In

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<sup>2</sup> *National Geographic Magazine: March 2009* (Copyright © 2009 by the National Geographic Society), page 76

the future they will be helping to educate us, putting the information and resources into our hands so that we can prioritize our commitment to sustaining God's gracious blessing in all the Earth.

Keep in mind what Kermit has to say. "It's not easy being green!" We can run away from our responsibility to protect the Earth. We can sit back and spectate as others take the lead as environmental stewards. Or we can commit to doing whatever we can – no matter how little or how great – to protect the legacy of God's blessings. Run, spectate, commit. It's not easy being green.