

On the Turning Away
(Genesis 1:27-31 and Luke 10:25-37)

As we gather this morning to celebrate God's creation, it's important that we understand what it means to be stewards of that creation. The theme this morning emphasizes "environmental" stewardship. Mike Horsley has told us more about what the Green Disciples are accomplishing and hoping to accomplish with respect to the mark our church leaves, or does not leave, on the environment. There is, however, another dimension to our role as stewards of God's creation.

Our authority and responsibility comes from Genesis. God created humankind and gave us dominion over the earth. In God's blessing we are called to "be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." To subdue the earth doesn't mean to abuse it. In fact, our authority and responsibility extends to the exact opposite, to use it wisely, to sustain it, and to share it with all humankind.

We have heard this morning about using the resources of the earth wisely and what we might do to sustain it for the future, but how are we sharing the earth with the balance of creation? Please pray with me:

Creating God, send forth your spirit upon us this morning and renew us as stewards of your awesome creation. Help us to not only use your resources wisely but also to share them with all your created order. Amen.

Earth Day presents us with the opportunity to check in to see how we are doing as stewards of the earth. This morning, let's look at a small snap shot of the United States. There are hundreds of statistics by which we can measure our success or failure as stewards of God's creation. Here are three that shed some light on how we are sharing the earth with others:

- The United States, with less than 5 % of the global population, uses about a quarter of the world's fossil fuel resources—burning up nearly 25 % of the coal, 26 % of the oil, and 27 % of the world's natural gas.
- As of 2003, the U.S. had more private cars than licensed drivers, and gas-guzzling sport utility vehicles were among the best-selling vehicles.
- New houses in the U.S. were 38 % bigger in 2002 than in 1975, despite having fewer people per household on average.¹

If we add to these statistics the consumption patterns of the rest of the industrialized world, we would probably find that less than 25% of the world's population uses more than 75% of its resources. As India and China become significant players in the global competition for the world's resources,

¹ <http://www.worldwatch.org/node/810>

the disparity will continue to grow between those who “have” and those who “have not.”

In 2009, more than one billion people were classified as undernourished, 12 percent more than in 2008. This means nearly one in six people on earth suffers from undernourishment or chronic hunger.² Those people and more live in poverty and violence. Stewardship of the earth includes not just how we use its resources, but also who shares the abundance of God’s creation. For this reason, stewardship of the earth includes addressing poverty, hunger, and violence. The green initiatives we are familiar with today are just the tip of the iceberg!

Last year on Earth Day we talked about whether we would run, spectate, or commit to being good stewards of the earth. The decision is no less important today. We simply can’t turn away from the fact that there is poverty, hunger, and violence in much of the world today. We can’t turn away from the fact that there is poverty, hunger, and violence right here in West Chicago.

The parable of the Good Samaritan we heard from the Gospel of Luke speaks to the task at hand. On the road, two prominent Judean citizens encounter a Jewish traveler who has been beaten, robbed, and left for dead. Both turn away from the man and ignore his suffering and need. In many respects, when we Americans, as 5% of the world consume 25% of its resources, are also turning away from the many people living in poverty, hunger, and violence around the world as well as in our community.

² <http://vitalsigns.worldwatch.org/vs-trend/global-chronic-hunger-rises-above-1-billion>

In our *Disciple One* Bible study we have spent much time considering the many ways God speaks to us. I know some of you will agree that God speaks to us in unusual ways, through our secular or cultural mediums, like music. Like a picture, sometimes a song can be worth 10,000 words. There is a very appropriate musical piece that sums up exactly what I have been trying to say for the past five minutes.

The song is titled “On the Turning Away.” It was written by David Gilmore of Pink Floyd and Anthony Moore. The lyrics can be followed on the screen. Please give it a serious listen.

*Just a world that we all must share
It's not enough just to stand and stare
Is it only a dream that there'll be
No more turning away?*

Is it only a dream that we might be able to bring an end to poverty, hunger, and violence in the world and share God’s creation in a more uniform and fair way? There is another dream that each of us here this morning has been living for a very long time. It’s called the American Dream. In the lyrics you just experienced it’s called the Dream of the Proud.

Unaware of just how bad things have become in our world today, our hearts may have very easily been turned to stone as we turn away from the reality that is poverty. One day we just may find that we are all alone in the Dream of the Proud – the American Dream!

So how are we doing on the fortieth anniversary of Earth Day? Can we pause long enough now to realize that our role as stewards of the earth involves much more than the greening

of our environment. It's not enough to clean up our own backyard when more than one sixth of the world population goes to bed hungry and wakes up the next day to go scrounging for its next meal.

As human beings we simply can't continue to be a part of the turning away from the weak and the weary. We need to take responsibility for becoming part of the solution and not a part of the problem. The size of the footprint we leave on the world is directly related to the turning away. There used to be a saying that would serve us well as we begin another year of caring for God's creation. "If you aren't living on the edge, you are taking up too much space." How much space are we taking up these days?