

Who Cares?

19 March 2006

Bible passage: **Genesis 1:26** (The Message)

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 the earth."

Sermon nugget: Monday, March 20, at 1:26 PM (EST) is the vernal (spring) equinox, and it is designated as International Earth Day. What does that mean for us, and how we are to care for the world?

Message part 1

Who cares? You've already heard some about that in our intro and welcome this morning. Some of those who care are part of our Comfort and Care Team, and several of them take turns carrying a cell phone to catch your calls, or to return your messages when you have a concern that needs prayers or a call or something more. Please post that magnet on your refrigerator so you'll have it handy.

There's another way to care, too. I suspect that some of us are aware that St. Luke's has undertaken a project called "T.I.M.E." which stands for "Together in ministry everyday. They have encouraged St. Lukers to give 90 minutes over the next 90 days helping others, especially those who are poverty stricken and in need.

Our modification of their booklet is available on the information table, and I urge us to pick up one and see where we can help. Obviously, choices always include any of our 10% recipients, such as Food Link that provides food for those in greatest need, or Dove Recovery that helps indigent women overcome substance abuse. Any of our organizations can use our time and energy, as well as our financial resources.

Today, we're talking about another way we can care. Frankly, I doubt that many of us are aware that tomorrow is a special day around the globe. In 1971, The United Nations Secretary-General, U Thant at the time, supported a global initiative to celebrate the vernal equinox as "Earth Day." U Thant made the following statement in support of this new observance: **"May there only be peaceful and cheerful Earth Days to come for our beautiful Spaceship Earth as it continues to spin and circle in frigid space with its warm and fragile cargo of animate life."**

This was the aim of the first international Earth Day, and it continued with U.N. support. Then in 1975, the U.S. Congress along with President Ford proclaimed and urged observance of Earth Day on the March equinox. Although many in the U.S. regard April 22nd as Earth Day, the global date is officially tomorrow, and to be exact, it's at 1:26 PM, Eastern Standard Time tomorrow. It is precisely at that time that in many places around the globe, bells will ring to chime the desire for peace around the world.

I wonder how many of us pay any attention to this observance, or to the one that happens each April in this country. Most of us, I suspect, may do a little bit toward making this planet a more desirable place to live, but we may not be totally aware of what this is all about, and further, why we need to be concerned and do our part to green up the planet.

Actually, a good starting place for figuring out what this has to do with us is our Bible passage for today. It's from the first creation story in Genesis, and our version from *The Message* puts it this way: **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 the earth."**

As the passage puts it, we are "responsible" for the fish, the birds, the animals, and even the earth itself. We are "responsible." I know some of may have a problem with this responsibility thing, but maybe we can sort it out a bit differently. To be responsible for all the living things of the earth, in a sense, really means that we are trustees or guardians, or protectors, or caregivers of the earth and all of its life. A trustee is **"an individual who holds or manages assets for the benefit of another."** To manage this earth and all its beings for the benefit of both ourselves and all other life is not an option. It's really why we're here.

I really like what President Ford said when proclaiming the March 20th Earth Day observance. He said, **"The earth will continue to regenerate its life sources only as long as we and all the peoples of the world do our part to conserve its natural resources. It is a responsibility in which every human being shares. Through voluntary action, each of us can join in building a productive land in harmony with nature."** That sounds much like our Bible passage to me. We have a role to play in the well-being of the earth, and it's the role of caregiver, preserver, protector and trustee of this incredible universe in which we live. It is a shared responsibility.

Being a trustee of the earth is a big deal, because there are so many facets that come into play. Caring for the environment is certainly one vital piece, and it also means working to eliminate poverty and violence, foster peaceful progress, and help human beings come fully alive to the wonders of this world. Obviously, there are numerous areas of focus, from water and forestation, to population, literacy, hunger, care of children, human rights and more.

Wow! That means the options are of great magnitude, should we choose to live up to the responsibility, which we have been given. In fact, this whole message began to gel when I was in Florida recently. It was the day I worked on the Habitat project, and although I didn't go with the work group, all of them took the time to visit a place called "Echo." That's a Global Village that is a research and learning center. The goal of the organization is to give those who are passionate about helping others a wide range of experiences

so they can do exactly that, especially in tropical and sub-tropical lands.

The group was fascinated by what they saw and experienced there. It's too vast for me to go into detail, but suffice it to say, that one of the things I have heard about the most is the various ways in which food can be grown to alleviate poverty and hunger. One of the most-frequently mentioned areas had to do with growing a garden in a tire, producing enough food to feed a family.

The Global Village is divided into six areas that replicate the various tropical climates and conditions in which marginal people often find themselves living. In learning how to grow seeds and foods in these different types of climate, interns acquire skills and knowledge that can be transmitted to those who live daily in those areas. They learn how to work with hillside farming, on urban rooftop gardens, in tropical monsoon seasons, in areas of rain forest clearing, in the semi-arid tropics, and in hot humid lowlands.

Some of us might be interested in checking this out online to see the various offerings of Echo, and you can do that via a link on our website. Remember that's www.the-garden.org. Actually, our folks who went to Kenya 18 months ago saw some of the very same thing in action there. Take a look at the screens.

VIDEO: Kenya Farm

Message part 2

My point in mentioning this project in Florida and the work in Kenya is that this seemed to direct us toward another way we can care about our world. I doubt seriously that many of us are going to have the opportunity in the near future to go to some of the lands where such tropical conditions exist, but we can still observe Earth Day tomorrow, and we can do our part to take care of this planet. We can learn to be good trustees, good caregivers.

"How?" you may be asking. How can I do anything? We can do a lot—you and I! Allow me to make some suggestions, starting with the obvious. If we're not already doing it, let's recycle. Most of us are aware of the necessity of that very thing, but it may seem like a lot of trouble. Really, it isn't; it doesn't take much time, and it's something every one of us can do. I, for one, always appreciate eating in places that designate the recyclables from those that are not. By putting our trash in the correct containers, we're already helping out.

One of the things that, frankly, I hadn't thought much about include checking the tires on our car once a month, because properly inflating our tires improves gas mileage. Actually, I read that under-inflated tires waste more than two million gallons of gasoline a day, along with being a safety hazard.

We could also carpool or take public transportation to work once a week, or we could walk or ride our bikes. All of those things save gasoline, and help the environment and our pocket books if we do them. And here's another little tidbit:

If every household replaced one light bulb with a compact fluorescent bulb, it would be the equivalent of eliminating the pollution from 1 million cars!

Another thing we can do is to get our names off junk mail lists. Did you know that 100 million trees are felled each year just to produce junk mail? I don't know about you, but 90% of the stuff I receive winds up in the wastebasket anyway, so why not stop getting it?

If we're on the coast for any reason, we can do our part there, even while on vacation or business. Most of us like to walk the beach at least once if we're in the vicinity, so why not help clean it up? I read somewhere that, in 1999, folks intent on doing just that picked up and removed more than 3 million pounds of litter from 7,284 miles of our nation's coastline. Plastic trash is especially harmful to marine life, and needs special attention to preserve the fish of the sea.

And you know what, virtually these activities I've mentioned have a side benefit. They burn calories, give us exercise and help reduce our tendency toward being overweight and at considerable health risk. We can burn 171 calories painting over graffiti, 162 planting trees and flowers, 225 clearing out an illegal dumping site, 216 collecting recyclables, and 171 picking up litter. That would be taking good care of yet another vital part of our planets—human beings.

So, you see, this isn't just some radical "green" thing that some folks get into; it's the responsibility of every single one of us. We are trustees of the earth and every living thing that is part of it. I guess my question for each of us to consider is this: Do we care enough to take the responsibility we've been given seriously? Are we doing our part to be good trustees of the planet?

Closing:

As we leave here this morning, each of us will receive a tree to take home and plant. Planting 30 trees each year can offset greenhouse gases from our cars and homes. Today, we have the opportunity to plant way more than 30 trees! I hope and pray that each of us will take a tree with us, plant it, and take a step toward fulfilling our trustee responsibilities.

Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.