

St. Mark's Lutheran Church
July 8, 2012
John 1:1-14

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It is wonderful to be with you this morning.

-Introductory comments-

I am often known as the “eco-minister”. I am the one who won't shut up or give up. I am constantly challenging people to make care for creation a priority matter of faith.

It is true, I do this and I believe that care for Creation is as central to the Christian faith as love, justice and peace. And because I won't stop preaching and talking about it, and will go to extremes, I am referred to as the *Loose Canon*.

I justify my single-issue ministry (which is not single issue REALLY because the climate and accompanying influence on the environment affects every aspect of life) --- I justify my preaching by asking the question, “Can you sit in a pew and profess to love God and your neighbor and NOT be concerned about protection of God's Creation?” You cannot.

We as people of faith should be leading the environmental movement. Isn't abuse of natural resources and pollution of

your neighbor's air a sin against creation? If you love your neighbor, you don't pollute your neighbor's air. Simple. You don't put engine oil in the storm drain behind your house. Simple. Where does it go??? To your neighbor, the Bay, the ocean, the fish----who eats the fish?? This is a simplistic example of the fact that everything is interconnected and interdependent.

Everything that God created matters. And we and our behavior matter, too.

We are all theologians -which means that theology matters, too. I say that because God has a place in our lives. We think about God, pray to and with God, depend on God and we hopefully have a relationship with God. God created all that is and called it "good", we have a responsibility to see that it stays "good".

Therefore the environmental crisis is a theological problem, a problem that stems from our view of God and how we relate to God and each other. Our view of God can be one that encourages and/or permits destructive, unjust behavior or one that encourages right relationship and harmony with all of the created order.

How we treat our natural resources may just be an overt sign of our relationship with God. We demonstrate love and concern for each other by how we treat our neighbors and our environment. We show respect and love for God when we protect, heal and treat the Creation with reverence. You might just consider- how do I show my love for God and neighbor?

If you love your children and grandchildren or ever think about the future of our land, air and water and what it will be like for them when they are grown, prove it. Show them and God that you care. We can only do that by understanding and educating ourselves on the condition of the planet and what the future is going to look like.

Lots of folks ask the questions like “where does it say in Scripture, don’t blow the tops off mountains for coal, or where does it say leave the old growth trees for the spotted owl or don’t stand on the coral reef for you will kill it?” Those kinds of instruction are not in our scripture, but there are lots of things that call us to be good neighbors. The most prevalent one is the first and great commandment. We don’t need much more than LOVE God and love your neighbor. But there is lots more.

In Genesis, God put Adam in the garden to care for it, to till it and to keep it. In our baptismal vows we are asked to

renounce any evil that destroys the creatures of God. And Jesus said, “What you do to the least of us, you do to me”. The poor who contribute the least to environmental problems are suffering the most.

And for more serious study, consider the gospel lesson this morning from John. *“In the beginning was the word and the word was with God, not one thing came into being that didn’t come through the word. The creation comes through the word. So everything will be reconciled to God through Jesus.”*

Everything, not just human beings. But we were given dominion and have a responsibility to the creatures of God. It is so clear in this passage. Just read!

The Word, that is before all things and is God, is the source of all creation. And that Word becomes flesh and blood, the very stuff of creation. The Word of life becomes part of the living planet called Earth.

If Jesus was there in the beginning then HE, too, calls us to care for the creation.

Because my ministry is focused almost exclusively on the climate and because the climate will decide what crops will grow where and how well, and what diseases will proliferate,

and where and when the fires will break out and who will die of extended heat days or extreme flooding, I must mention what is happening across this country weather-wise.

AND before I even start, thank God that you live here in San Francisco. If you are visiting from some other part of the US you know what it is like out there in the Center, the South and the East coast of the US. People are dying of heat. Crops are rotting from floods or dying on the vine because of drought. Fires are raging in Colorado, Texas and New Mexico. Half of this country is over 100 degrees. The scientists say now that this is only the beginning.

I have always said that scientists are our modern day prophets. They told us thirty years ago that carbon dioxide was a heat trapping gas and too much of it would trap heat close to the earth causing it and the oceans to warm. We didn't listen and became overly dependent on fossil fuels for energy. We are now paying the price of not listening.

It is understandable that we didn't listen. Carbon dioxide isn't something you can feel or smell and the climate change that we have seen over many years was far away in the snow covered poles--- too far away for us to relate. And while we all love polar bears and their habitat, we didn't connect that

eventually, we would feel the effects of a warming climate. So all these years, while the science was becoming clearer and clearer, we went on with oil, coal and gas as our priority energy resource and did not listen to the prophets.

It isn't too late, though. We will see more of the same as we move along in the 21st century, but we CAN turn the trend around. There is hope all around with new technology.

Renewable energy is coming on-line and growing rapidly now. Jobs are being created, more and more people driving smaller cars and using energy more efficiently- that is crucial and it is happening.

California has the country's first global warming bill going into effect in 2013, which will limit green house gases -carbon pollution. AND congregations all over the US -14,000 of them- are starting to serving as examples to their communities with things like energy efficient appliances, solar on the roof, community gardens and car pooling to Sunday services. There are 540 congregations here in California who are part of the Interfaith Power and Light campaign. St. Mark's is one too.

This country is a democracy, however, and one cannot ignore how close we are to Independence Day. So I think it is appropriate to mention that in a democracy, there is only one

way to make cultural change: and that is by changing the government. Which is only possible by changing people's hearts and minds so that they vote differently.

What institution changes hearts and minds? Churches and that is why the religious voice is so important in the dialogue looking for solutions to climate change. In other words, the political rests on the personal. As religious people we must do our part -and we have a big role in this. If we don't protect creation, how can we possibly expect others to? Moral leadership sits right here with us.

The personal and the political need to join in order to create the kind of human action in the world that will maintain a just and sustainable planet. Individuals *cannot* do it by themselves. We can and must do our part and be examples to others, but the system needs to be changed—the major forces within society that regulate and control our use of fossil fuels.

Our job then is to become informed, do our part and vote for public officials who understand that we will not be the healthy children that God intended and we will not live on a healthy planet unless we can get beyond partisanship and do what is right for the entire communion of life. The Creation that God called good, the Creation where God put Adam and said till and

keep this garden. The Creation that sustains us and will continue to sustain us if we do our part.

We have a responsibility to each other, to the future and to God. A sense of gratitude would go a long way in changing our behavior. Gratitude and Love are feelings that will change hearts and minds. If we can draw on those emotions more deeply, we will be the people that God placed in the garden to till it and to keep it. We will be obeying the first and great commandment to love God and each other and to love our neighbors as ourselves.