

2018 Spring Bible Study – Act Justly

Week 3: Creation Care, Environmental Justice

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Introduction

Margaret is a mother of 13. All her life, she has provided for her family by farming the small parcel of land that she owns in Kenya. But lately, farming in her part of the world has become much less predictable. The rains used to come every year at the same time—sometimes on the same day each year. But now, the rains have become erratic. They come two weeks late or three weeks early. They come all at once, flooding her seeds or not watering them at all, leaving her crops to die in the field. As a result, Margaret now has to leave her children every day in order to work so she can buy food at the market to feed her children. Her entire family has fallen into food insecurity.

Experts continents away from Margaret understand that these shifting weather patterns over East Africa and the rest of the world have a cause: a climate that is rapidly changing due to global greenhouse gas emissions.

What sort of response does Margaret’s story—and the story of millions of families just like her—call forth from us? Does scripture have anything to say about our relationship to the nonhuman creation, about God’s ultimate plans for the world, and about how we are to respond to stories like Margaret’s? Can Margaret’s situation be called an injustice, and if so, how can Christians faithfully respond?

Reading the Word Read these passages with your group. (Each person can take a verse.)

Genesis 2:1-9

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. **2** And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. **3** So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

4 These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

Another Account of the Creation

In the day that the Lord^[a] God made the earth and the heavens, **5** when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; **6** but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— **7** then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground,^[b] and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. **8** And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. **9** Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

Colossians 1:15-20

¹⁵ [Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶ for in^[a] him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in^[b] him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Discussion

1. In the Genesis passage, what did you notice about *how* God formed human beings? What difference could this make for our consideration about our relationship to the rest of creation?
2. Which verbs did the translation you read use in the second half of Gen. 1:15?
 - a. In Hebrew, the two verbs used here are *avad* and *shamar*. The best translation of these verbs is “to serve, be a slave to” and “to guard, protect”.
 - b. What difference would it make for verse 15 if the verbs used were “to serve and protect” the garden?
3. In Colossians 1:15-20 notice how many times Paul uses the phrase “all things”. What point do you think Paul is working so hard to convey here?
4. If Christ is reconciling “all things” to himself, does that mean the nonhuman creation too? If so, what impact might that have on our relationship to the natural world?

Application

In Matthew 22, Jesus explains that every single one of the 600+ commandments and the countless teachings of the Prophets could be boiled down to two commandments: 1) love God with everything you’ve got, and 2) love your neighbor as if they were you yourself.

When it comes to caring for creation and getting serious about addressing climate change, it’s about more than hugging trees and saving polar bears. It’s about getting better at following obeying Jesus’ dual commands. It’s about loving God better by loving the good world that he created and that he loves, and that he invites us to love and care for as well. It’s about making sure our global neighbors like Margaret—and our neighbors down the street—have the chance to live healthy lives marked by flourishing and abundance rather than scarcity and fear. It’s about getting better at following Jesus.

So how do we do this? There are countless ways, big and small, that you can deepen in your faithfulness to loving God and your neighbor by caring for creation. Here are a few suggestions:

Take the Next Step

There are so many joyful, life-giving ways that we can orient our lives to be in better relationship with the rest of creation. Below are only a handful of possibilities. Consider choosing just one and trying it for the coming month. Then next month, add another action to the existing one. Before you know it, you will be making a big difference!

- Turn off lights and unplug devices when not in use
- Commit to taking the bus, walking, or riding your bike instead of driving whenever possible
- Bring reusable bags to the grocery store
- Research the social and ecological impact of your purchases at betterworldshopper.com
- Use reusable water bottles (e.g. CUPPS mug)

- If you buy your own groceries, try getting most of them from local sources like the Fulton Street Farmer's Market
- If you live off-campus, turn your heat down one degree for the rest of winter
- If you are traveling for spring or summer break, offset your travel at climatestewards.org/offset
- Observe Meatless Mondays (and maybe even Meatless Tuesdays, Wednesday, etc. when you're ready)
- Share these commitments with other people and help them understand why it matters for you, as a follow of Jesus, to take these steps.

Dig Deeper

There are many books and resources available to help you get a better picture of the God's love for creation, our responsibility toward creation, and the role of creation in God's larger story of salvation. Here are a couple of the better ones. Consider reading one of these:

- *For the Beauty of the Earth* by Steven Bouma-Prediger
- *A Climate for Change* by Katharine Hayhoe and Andrew Farley
- *Caring for Creation* by Mitch Hescocox and Paul Douglas

Dive In

Ready to go even deeper? Personal lifestyle changes are important, but societal and institutional change will only come about through just and effective public policy. If you're ready to go deeper in your response to God's call to love God and your neighbor by caring for creation, then make advocacy for public policy a regular practice in your life. It's easier than you might think. Those of us who are citizens of our countries can advocate for the care of God's creation.

For those of us who are US citizens, here's everything you need to know about making a phone call to your members of Congress:

1. Dial (202) 224-3121 and follow the prompts to be connected to your Representative and both of your Senators
2. When the receptionist in their offices answers, simply tell him/her that you have a message for the Representative/Senator.
3. Share why you, as a Christian and a constituent, care about creation care and climate change. Here is a sample script you can use for calling your Representative. Feel free to use it verbatim or to personalize it.

Sample script

"Hi, I have a message for the Representative. My name is __ (name) __ and I am a constituent from __ (city) __. As a Christian, I believe that some of our greatest responsibilities are to love God and to love our neighbors. Acting to address climate change and to care for creation is a chance to do both better. I urge the Representative to do everything s/he can to address the challenges posed by climate change. In particular, I'd ask that s/he join the Bipartisan Climate Solutions Caucus, a bipartisan group meeting regularly to discuss bipartisan legislation to address climate change."

Prayer

Creator God, you made the world with love and joy. You reveled in the goodness of the creation before we humans were ever even on the scene. And then you invited us, your image bearers, to serve and protect the creation as you yourself do.

We confess that we so often fall short of this calling. We so often choose expedience, convenience, comfort, and accumulation over service, reciprocity, and right relationship when it comes to your good creation.

Forgive us, Oh Lord, and help us to change.

May we, your church, rediscover our identity as earthkeeping people, called to love you and love our neighbors by loving your whole world. And as we do, may your gospel of the reconciliation of *all things* be proclaimed into all the earth, and may your kingdom continue to come on earth as it is in heaven.

We pray this all in the name of the One in whom we live and move and have our being: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.