

South Bay Community Church
Sermon Reflections
Life Reimagined – Creation Care
15 & 16 October 2022
Lead Pastor Tammy Long

Scripture Text: Psalm 24:1a

Sermon Preamble

We continue our journey for a life reimagined because we are created for a good, beautiful, and exceedingly abundant life as stewards in God's Kingdom. In this message we are looking at another resource God has entrusted to us: the Care of Creation. Environmental care, global warming, and saving the planet have become hot and sometimes controversial topics in our world. Caring for Creation from a Christian perspective has a different starting point, motivation, and end game from the a worldly perspective. What needs to happen for a sustainable planet may look the same, but in the Christian perspective, we reimagine creation care with a different lens and mindset. For a follower of Jesus, Caring for Creation is not political and is not optional. Life Reimagined is a new way of thinking and being. God's design is that the created world needs us, and we need the world. Let us live Lives Reimagined where Care for Creation is what we do as we love what God loves, in order to accomplish God's mission for the glory of God.

In the beginning, God as intelligent designer

The Bible begins with the phrase, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...." (Genesis 1:1). On the 7th day, God rested. Whether you believe that God accomplished creation in – 6 literal days of 24 hours each, 6 periods of time, or a poetic depiction of the origins of life, the common denominator is that God is the intelligent designer of the origins of life. The natural creation came first before humanity. "You -alone- are the Lord. You made the skies and the heavens and all the stars. You made the earth and the seas and everything in them. You preserve them all..." (Nehemiah 9:6). It was good all by itself! After each period of time, God declared it was good.

Then God created the "piece de resistance": human beings in God's own image, male and female earth creatures. "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. The world and all of its people belong to him" (Psalm 24:1a). We have become accustomed to Adam like it is a proper name. Literally in the Hebrew, the name for the male Adam comes from the Hebrew word "Adama," which means earth or soil. So Adam actually means earth creature. Our very identity as humans is one with the earth and all of creation. Physicists have discovered this truth. Everything in the universe affects everything else in the universe. As humans, we are intricately and intimately connected to God's creations. Literally in the Hebrew, the name for the female Eve means life. As Adam and Eve are earth creatures, through their unity, life is created and continues on. In the sixth period of time, God saw his handiwork, and said it was good!

In the garden of delight, God entrusted Adam and Eve to manage God's creations

Eden is the garden where God places Adam and Eve. Literally in the Hebrew, Eden means delight. So God puts the first human beings in God's garden of delight. God gave Adam and Eve an assignment and a responsibility. "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it" (Genesis 1:26). "The Lord God placed the man (human beings) in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it" (Genesis 2:15). God entrusted Adam and Eve with God's beloved creation. That creation was not given to them to own; it was given to them to manage. Creation and everything in it belongs to God.

In giving Adam and Eve responsibility as stewards, God provided everything they would need in abundance to care for the garden well. God invited them to be fruitful, multiply. They flourished in every way, not just in procreation, but in abundant living. Humanity was given the keys to enjoy paradise, to enjoy God, and all of God's creations forever. In essence, God had established an earthly

temple where God would dwell with God's beloved creation. Humanity was to be, in essence, the priests of that earthly temple caring for creation in service to God. It was VERY GOOD.

We can still find that goodness today. Spaces and places can take your breath away with the fullness of God. For example, John Muir wrote, "No temple made with hands can compare with Yosemite. Every rock in its wall seems to glow with life."

At one time it was all very good, but then it wasn't

In the biblical text, things then began to crumble. Adam and Eve chose not to follow God's best for them. Instead, they made another decision, and the ripple effect of consequences continues until today. First, there was the broken relationship between humanity and God: Adam and Eve hid and no longer took walks in the garden with their creator. Second, there was a broken relationship between humans: distrust and jealousy manifested and humans began to fight. Third, there was disconnection with creation. The consequences and evils of sin rushed in and continue to this day.

In these middle periods of time now, the problem is Us

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and God entrusted the creation to Us. Now the problem is Us. "Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (Romans 8:20-22).

Our environmental issues are deep and wide. The earth is in trouble and sick; some say the earth is dying. As we dig deeper into the issues facing planet earth, the need for change becomes more compelling and convicting. The problem collectively is us.

God's original assignment for us to care for the earth has not changed. We may no longer be in the Garden of Eden, but we are still responsible for the resources God has entrusted to us. We are not only using them, but we are abusing those resources.

All the while, we are dependent on those resources. We are dependent on the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the water we drink. We are dependent on all the ecosystems and connections of every kind like the oceans, rivers, forests, animals, soil, algae, and fungi. We are creatures of the earth and connected to the earth. The health and quality of our lives is directly linked to the health and quality of this earth.

God has entrusted us to steward creation as an act of worship and loving God

This world is not ours. God entrusted the world to us to care for as a steward in worship and love of God. That is how our response to environmental care differs from the world's view. Yes, environmental care is about our quality of life. Yes, this is about protecting our world for the generations coming behind us. However, most importantly, Creation Care is about honoring God's creation as God's temple. Environmental care is about remembering that this is our Father God's World. If anyone should be on the frontlines for environmental care, it should be the children of God advocating for what is best for the world God has entrusted to us. We should be leading the pack because God's assignment to care for the earth as stewards of the earth never changed. The earth is crying out. God still trusts us to be responsible to govern the earth and care for the land.

Environmental care becomes an act of worship and expression of our love for God when we love what God loves. God loves the world. For when God created this world, God took delight in it and said it was good.

Expressed in human terms, it pains God to see the degradation of the created world

God knows the reality of what is to come. The Bible tells us of God's disappointment with humanity in the days of Noah. It must pain God now, as it should pain us, to see God's beloved earth

hurting as it is. It should pain us to see when giant chunks of glaciers just fall into the sea, when Greenland that is supposed to be icy looks green, when forests are stripped leaving miles of stumps, and when pollution is so thick, we have to stay indoors.

With the entrance of sin, God's mission grew to heal and redeem this broken world

Now, we are invited to care for the earth as part of God's mission to heal and redeem this broken world. That is why Jesus came. "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him, to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, to make peace by the blood of his cross." (Colossians 1:19-20). As we partner with God on God's mission, we too are seeking opportunities through the Spirit at work within us to restore, redeem, reconcile. We manifest the Kingdom of God wherever brokenness, evil, injustice is found. That includes redeeming and healing creation.

Big business, individual practices, and greed is raping the earth. Systemic injustices manifest and are exacerbated by environmental issues. Care for the earth is part of God's grand mission to extend God's love, justice, and peace on earth as it is in heaven.

The call to justice for inequality and oppression in environmental care

Part of our mission of creative care means bringing the good news of justice and advocating for those who need support when there is inequality or oppression. A 2009 report from the University of Southern California noted the consequences of climate change, such as extreme heat, air pollution, and devastating floods resulted in higher risks of death for African Americans and low-income individuals as compared to white and wealthier neighborhoods. Low income neighborhoods frequently in low-lying areas are particularly vulnerable to the climate change effects of hurricanes and catastrophic flooding.

Intense heat is another concern of low-income communities. Sometimes, we are asked to stay indoors to avoid pollution exposure on hot days. A survey in South Los Angeles, where residents are predominately people of color, found that three/fifths of households did not have air conditioning. Dealing with the sweltering reality can be particularly challenging for those with health challenges and for those without access to cars to find cooler places. Additional studies have found that a disproportionate 39% of Americans who live near coal plants are people of color. Black children are four times more likely to die of asthma than white children.

Creation care is not just about caring for the planet earth God loves and has entrusted to us. It is also about accomplishing the mission of God for the glory of God. The mission of God is about love to our neighbor the same way we love ourselves. The mission of God is about justice in the face of inequality and systemic racism. The mission of God is about witnessing to the world, as image bearers of the Creator, who loved this world enough to die not just to save humanity but to save all of creation.

Care for creation is about reimagining a world where we can say, "It is Very Good," by doing our part until Jesus returns. The earth is sick and struggling right now. As stewards on a mission, we must fulfill what God has asked of us - to care for creation.

The creation and followers of God are both waiting for the promise of a future glory

Paul writes about creation groaning under the bondage of sin. Paul then continues with, "And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We too wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights, as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us" (Romans 8:23). Creation is waiting, just as we are waiting, for the fullness of God to complete God's plan. God's plan began in the Garden of Eden at the beginning of time. We are waiting for the promise. In God's fullness of time, we will all be released from the weight of sin once and for all. Those who have chosen to follow God, as well as creation, will all be released. We are waiting in

confident hope for that day when we will go “back to the future.” Back to the future is back to God’s original vision in the garden, where there is beauty, joy, and communion with God and one another. There is worship and praise of our Lord in harmony with all of creation.

Isaiah paints the future when he writes, “We will live in joy and peace. The mountains and hills will burst into song, and the trees of the field will clap their hands!” (Isaiah 55:12). “Where once there were thorns, cypress trees will grow. Where nettles grew, myrtles will sprout up. These events will bring great honor to the Lord’s name; they will be an everlasting sign of his power and love” (Isaiah 55:13).

This is the promise of what is to come. We will have new bodies, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth. The people of God will dwell with God. We can read all about it in Revelation 21. The curse of sin will be removed, and all of heaven and earth will sing a new song of joy praising God, God’s power, and God’s love for the glory of God. The mission of God will be accomplished. That is the promise our confident trust in Christ is built upon. No one knows when that will happen. What does a life reimagined for the Care of Creation look like now in the meantime?

Life Reimagined for the Care of Creation needs to invoke CPR

Given the state of affairs for our planet earth, and our mission as God’s stewards, a Life Reimagined needs C - Commitment to care, P – Play and enjoy creation, and R - Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Repeat practices.

Commit to care will look different for different people. It could include the decision to live differently, to select an issue to learn more about, to brush up on environmental legislation and the impact of such policies, to join or support an environmental organization, and to help start a Creation Care Ministry at South Bay Community Church. We should commit to taking the mission of stewarding God’s creation to a new level.

Play and enjoy creation. God said creation was good. Creation brought God pleasure, and it is intended to bring us pleasure. Spending time in nature is good for mental and physical health; spending time in nature restores our souls. God intends for us to enjoy the natural world as God does. As part of our commitment to care for creation, let us make sure we are delighting in the gift God has given us. Give God the praise for God’s marvelous handiwork.

Reduce, reuse, recycle, and repeat is probably not new to us. But perhaps as part of a renewed commitment to care, we can each take these practices to the next level. Our small contribution can make a difference because everything is truly connected. Moreover, it is what God would have us do. Even if no one sees it, and it seems insignificant in our eyes, God does see it.

Here is a website address on 100 ways to save the planet:

<https://healtheplanet.com/100-ways-to-heal-the-planet/>.

You may already be doing some. Others you may have done in the past, but you got out of the habit. Still others may be new ideas you are ready to try.

A Life Reimagined is a new way of thinking and being as we love what God loves

While CPR is an emergency life support measure, a life reimagined is a new way of thinking and being. God has abundantly given us the beauty and gift of creation. The world needs us, and we need the world; that is God’s design. Let us live Lives Reimagined where Care for Creation is simply what we do as we love what God loves to accomplish the mission for the glory of God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Sermon Preamble

-What is the difference between the Christian perspective in loving what God loves and a worldly perspective of simply keeping our planet sustainable? Why is this different mindset important?

In the beginning, God as intelligent designer

-The Hebrew word, “yom,” translated day in Genesis 1 is used sometimes to refer to periods of indefinite length, and other times to refer to a day of 24 hours. If the meaning of “yom” in Genesis 1 is a period of indefinite length, does this help you reconcile the Genesis account of creation with the claims of science? Why is this important or not important?

In the garden of delight, God entrusted Adam and Eve to manage God’s creations

-In what ways are the names of Adam and Eve connected to life on earth? How do they speak to the close interdependence of humans and other creations on earth?

God has entrusted us to steward creation as an act of worship and loving God

-The Canaanites had a worldview that the seas and waters were chaotic forces and not under the control of God. Let’s review Psalm 24:1a. What is the biblical view on God’s dominion over the earth and the environment? Why are the natural creations not simply chaotic forces, but under the dominion of God?

At one time it was all very good, but then it wasn’t

-How has the fall of sin broken the perfect relationship from the Garden of Eden and also broken the relationship of God and humans with creation?

In these middle periods of time now, the problem is Us

-How is the problem of caring for earth’s environment manifesting, both collectively in our culture and individually as abuse of the resources God has provided?

God has entrusted to us creation to steward as an act of worship and loving God

-How can we care for the environment an act of worship and love for God?

Expressed in human terms, it pains God to see the degradation of the created world

-What physical or mental pains, if any, have you experienced from the harm being done to the earth’s environment? How does this pain reflect an attribute of the Almighty God?

With the entrance of sin, God’s mission grew to heal and redeem this broken world

-What opportunities do you have to partner with God’s mission to restore, redeem, reconcile, and heal God’s creation on environmental issues?

The call to justice for inequality and oppression in environmental care

-How can we do our part, collectively and individually, to reduce inequality and oppression on low-income communities and individuals?

The creation and followers of God are both waiting for the promise of a future glory

-What are parallels between followers of Jesus and creation groaning, eagerly awaiting the new future age, and the physical redemption of bodies? For us and for material creation, the physical redemption is promised, but not yet fully realized, so we wait for it with confident hope and with endurance when we face hardships and suffering. What glimpses do you see in yourself and material creation of the future glory?

Life Reimagined for the Care of Creation needs to invoke CPR

-While we await the promised hope of future glory, why is it important for each of us to commit to a Life Reimagined for Creation Care?