

**Sermon for Sunday, June 3, 2012**  
**Dr. Dan Doriani**  
**Caring for Creation**

*1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground. 29 Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground — everything that has the breath of life in it — I give every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning — the sixth day.*

### **1. Problems with Creation**

In the film “Grand Canyon,” an attorney tries to find his way out of a traffic jam in Los Angeles. His new route takes him along streets that become more and more rough and deserted. Then the nightmare: his expensive car stalls on an alarming street. The attorney calls a tow truck, but before it arrives, five young street toughs surround his disabled car and threaten him with bodily harm. Just in time, the tow truck shows up and its driver – an earnest, genial man – begins to hook up to the disabled car. The gang protests: the truck driver is interrupting their meal.

The driver takes the leader aside and attempts a short lesson in philosophy: "Maybe you don't know that, but this ain't the world it's supposed to be. I'm supposed to be able to do my job without askin' you if I can. And that dude is supposed to be able to wait with his car without you rippin' him off. Everything's supposed to be different than what it is here."

This world is not the way it's supposed to be. Our summer series is "Caring For" and today we switch from care for ourselves – our mind, emotions, and body – to care for neighbors and the wider world. It's obvious that creation is not the way it's supposed to be. There are earthquakes and tsunamis in the Pacific, hurricanes in the Atlantic, tornadoes in the states, weeds and bugs in our yards. Droughts, floods and heat waves are everywhere.

That's not the way it's supposed to be. Question: Is that a mere fact or are we involved? Are we spectators as disasters unfold? Or do we share responsibility? Should we repent of our sins? Protest against pollution?

Wendell Berry says the environmental movement is different from all others. Protests against war come and go because wars end. But creation care is closer to home: "Every time we draw a breath, every time we drink a glass of water, every time we eat a bite of food" we either suffer from pollution or reap the results of someone's care for God's creation. Our actions have consequences. Berry: "A protest

[against] environmental abuse is not a convocation of accusers, it is a convocation of the guilty. We are causing the crisis."<sup>1</sup>

Life is not the way it's supposed to be. Our story doesn't unfold as planned, so we suffer *regrets, fears, anxieties, futility*. After the fall, Romans says, God subjected creation to futility. One price of human rebellion is chaos in creation. The ground now bears thorns and thistles and suffers droughts.

Luther: Because of the curse, the earth no longer gives us its best. Calvin: God placed humans as "spectators" in the "glorious theatre" of his creation. Yet the curse and the fall "of the human mind" make creation "insufficiently effective" to lead us to God. Blights, accidents, disease on one side and willful blindness on the other make it hard for us to learn much about God by looking at the world.

Behind all this trouble and disruption lies human sin. Cornelius Plantinga says, "A sin is any act – any thought, desire, emotion, word, or deed - that displeases God and deserves blame". A sin is any blameworthy act or disposition that is a personal affront to a personal God. Sin offends God. And sin disrupts the peace, wholeness, and shalom of the world.

Bear with me for a moment. We need to define the forms of sin so we can think clearly about creation care. For example, we can distinguish objective and subjective sin. An objective sin breaks God's law and offends God and mankind. In subjective sin, a person intends to break the law, whether he actually does so or not.

Suppose a boy sees a piece of pie. Thinking it's someone else's pie, he gobbles it up. A moment later his mother says, "I laid out a piece of pie for you." Even though he ate his own pie, he still sinned because he *meant* to steal. He meant to do harm.

To be clear about creation care, we need to understand how we can sin against creation. Here we distinguish voluntary and involuntary sins. Voluntary sins are chosen, deliberate, planned. Involuntary sins happen without design. When attitudes like anger, envy or pride come over us, we experience involuntary sin.

Habitual sins, thoughtless sins, sins that everyone around us commits, can be involuntary too. We may not mean to sin, but we do. Take the way we talk about other people. Generally, we speak kindly to people to their face and criticize in their absence. Groups have tendencies. Children complain about parents, parents complain about children. At work, we compliment the boss to his or her face and let it rip when he or she is not around. We don't mean to sin, we follow the crowd.

Many sins against God the Creator and his creation are unplanned, invisible to us, involuntary. I suspect that applies to our problems with creation.

### **Creation care and our ignorance**

It's difficult to care for creation. Suppose you resolve to care for creation in your purchases. Leave aside the big questions about cars and houses. It's hard even to buy a frying pan. Consider fuel efficiency.

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<sup>1</sup> Berry "Think Little" *Art of the Commonplace*, pp 81-3.

Some metals have high thermal conductivity. They heat up faster, so save energy. Copper is king of conductivity, aluminum is second, cast iron is third. But wait, don't forget heat capacity - the ability to retain heat in a pan. Here cast iron is king. Cast iron also lasts for 300 years and it's easiest to clean, if done properly. Next, consider the energy it takes to manufacture your pan. More data is needed. Finally, there is reactivity. Copper and aluminum can poison us if misused; for reasons I can't fathom Teflon can kill animals. All of this for frying pans. How much greater the challenge of eating properly, traveling well. We simply don't have the knowledge to care for the world as we'd like. It seems hopeless. Or take care for animals...

Proverbs 12:10 says, "Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast" (English Standard Version (ESV)). Or "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal" (New International Version (NIV)). You may think, "Yes, I take good care of my dog, cat, pet." I'm glad that you do. But there is more.

Let's go to a restaurant. You are out with friends. You hear about the specials, which include veal. The server sweeps you along with a grand account of reduction sauces and rare spices. Your friend says, "That sounds delicious." Perhaps you say, "I'll have that too."

You've heard that the calves that become veal aren't always treated well. You almost ask, "Was the animal caged or free?" but you think "A good restaurant probably insists on range-free animals." You hope so – and push the thought away. You don't want to sound rude, judgmental. It would spoil the evening.

What you heard about veal is true. All too often calves are kept in cages so small they can't stand or walk. The meat stays tender that way. But if a "righteous man cares for the needs of his animal" that doesn't seem right. What to do? It would spoil the atmosphere if you asked, "Was the animal caged or free to roam?" The choice: Risk rudeness or risk supporting inhumane treatment of animals.

Lisa Cahill says the biblical doctrine of creation helps here. It removes humans from the center of the universe. Neither we nor our projects nor our pleasures are ultimate. God is the center of the universe. He is sovereign, good and just. There are beings who exist before us, not for us. They have value in themselves before God. That includes calves, lambs, and fireflies; trees and rivers.<sup>2</sup> The calf has value to God. God gives humanity freedom to eat all plant and animals but he declares that we must treat them well. A number of biblical laws show the Creator's concern.

Deut 25:4. Don't muzzle an ox while it's threshing out the grain - Hunger  
Deut 22:10 Don't plow with ox and donkey yoked together – Cruel to donkey  
Exod 23:4-5. Several laws require care for straying animals

How do we practice this? We honor God by trying to act as if he is indeed the center of the universe. Therefore we seek the good of his creatures and ask about the veal if we think to eat it. Ask politely, but ask.

Now let's broaden our concern from dinner to the rest of life. Genesis 1 says God spoke creation into existence: "Let there be light." Augustine called it creation *ex nihilo* - out of nothing. That God's power,

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<sup>2</sup> Cahill, Creation & Ethics in Oxford The Ethics 7-11.

order, and providence govern this world. There is a great divide between us, for He is the Creator, we the creatures.

"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Gen 1:31). And "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psa. 19:1). Marvelously, God said "Let us make man in our image..." and told mankind, "Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over every living creature." Therefore we should rule well. But we can be careless.

### **Carelessness**

Children smash insects for no reason. Boys with bb guns shoot birds. But adults are careless too. Disciples tend to focus on great sins like murder and tolerate "respectable" sins like greed and discontentment. Discontentment is a refusal to rest in God's provisions. There is an inordinate devotion to things, possessions (Matt 13:22). The desire for more and more can lead us to sin against creation. How so?

West Virginia is known for white-water rafting and coal mines. The same mountains that create terrific rivers are full of coal. If you drive to the river you may pass a strip mine. Have you seen one? Strip mines tear the entire top or side off a mountain, leaving a huge, lifeless gash. The runoff kills fish and chokes streams for miles.

America is to coal as Saudi Arabia is to oil: we lead the world in reserves. In 2000, miners took 170 million tons of coal from West Virginia. Don't blame evil mining companies. Coal provides half of America's electricity. We ask for it to power our toasters, lights, air conditioners. Don't criticize miners, ask what the Lord thinks of our hunger for energy. He placed the coal, iron, copper, and every other resource in the earth's crust. All the world's wealth depends on the resources God provides and He wants us to use them well.

## **2. God's creation deserves our care**

Like most of you, I hate the "guilt charts" that try to make people feel bad about prosperity. Example: A billion people have one or two gallons of water a day, while the average American uses 100 gallons per day. It's not our fault that it rains here and that we built reservoirs and water systems to preserve it.

God doesn't want our guilt-feelings. He wants our love, our thanks, for his goodness. In Jesus' day, the great natural resources were sun and rain. Jesus says the Father "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt 5:45).

God's creation is beautifully arranged. Plants inhale the carbon dioxide we exhale and we inhale the oxygen they exhale. So there is good engineering.

More, there is abundance to revel in. Astronomers estimate that there are two times ten to the twenty-third power stars in the universe. If every person who ever lived had to name stars for sixty hours a week, for sixty years, and gave each person twelve seconds to name each star, everyone would still need a thousand lifetimes to name all the stars.

Close examination of God's creation is rewarding too. The human body has somewhere between ten and eighty trillion cells, each with its purposes and micro-structures. You learned their names in Biology:

Golgi apparatus, rough and smooth endoplasmic reticulum, mitochondria, centrioles, ribosomes, nucleus, cell wall.

Or consider the atom, which we call the building block of the universe. Remember the number of stars and consider: There are far more atoms in one human body than there are stars in the universe – 40,000 times more.

The Bible says God created this for our pleasure and His delight. Job says God numbers the clouds and fathers rain, snow, hail, lightning and thunder. He feeds lion and mountain goat, ox and donkey, ostrich and horse. He sets the boundaries of land and sea (Job 38—40, especially 38:11). This is more than control. There is joy in dancing cranes, in swallows diving over a lake. Young whales and dolphins leap from the water, scientists believe, for the joy of it. They praise God just as he designed.

Dallas Willard: God must rejoice as he considers His creation: "We pay a lot of money to get a tank with a few tropical fish. God has seas full of them, which He constantly enjoys (Plantinga 25-26). God entrusted all this to our care and it deserves it.

### **3. God entrusted this world to our care**

In Genesis 1 God told humans to fill the earth, rule over it, care for it. Our task is give order, bring it to completion. Wild strawberries become big, sweet farm strawberries. We tame horses and cows so we can ride them and milk them. God wants each of us to develop his creation in our way. Are you looking for your way?

**Vision:** Creation care begins when we see the world this way, both when we gather to worship and between Sundays. So we praise God the Creator on Sunday and see the world as His creation on Monday.

Your bulletin cover has an image of a chameleon by my favorite artist. It's whimsical, yet realistic. It's the fruit of study and affection for creation. We should extend the same study, the same mindfulness, and affection for trees and grasses, hills and streams. Creation care begins with respect for God and His work.

**Duty.** Once we see the world as God's gift, care follows. Consider our chameleon again, which first came to me in a hand-made birthday card. Who would destroy such a card? But it's just a card! Not a real animal. How much more should we care for the plants and animals God created.

Deuteronomy 20:19 has a command about trees. The setting is laws for just war: "When you lay siege to a city do not destroy its trees... because you can eat their fruit. Do not cut them down. Are the trees of the field people, that you should besiege them?" The Lord says, "Respect the trees! Don't destroy them senselessly.

That principle – no heedless destruction – is where the believer can make common cause with environmentalists. That includes simple things. Let's recycle our paper. Turn off lights in empty rooms. Buy energy efficient cars, heating and air-conditioning. Plant trees and gardens. Eat local produce.

Creation care is not environmentalism. Secular environmentalism eradicates the distinction between Creator and creature. They deny that humans have a special role and value in creation. Some tend toward pantheism and ascribe god-like qualities to "Mother Nature" as if this world created itself. But nature is not god. We should not worship it or obey it or seek mystical union with it.

We should think about this world as God does. The term "environment" is neutral language for whatever surrounds us. Mother Nature personifies what is impersonal. The Bible calls it creation. God created this world. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world and those who dwell in it" (Psalm 24:1).

If we see the world as God's creation, according to Scripture, the main elements of creation care will be clear. First, living as the image of God, we rule and serve the lower creation as he would. We must hold two principles in creative tension:

We develop and fill the earth. We build cities and develop technology. We are free – expected – to consume fruits, plants and meat. Yet we also tend creation. That means we rejected greed and conspicuous consumption – the sort that flaunts ego and achievement and spoils the world.

In Luke 12, Jesus tells a parable about a rich farmer who hoarded his wealth for his selfish pleasure. At the end he said, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you." The word demanded is a commercial term used for the recall of a loan. God loans wealth to us and will ask us for an accounting: What did you do with the wealth I entrusted to you?

It baffles me that some Christians belittle creation care. Environmentalists can be shrill and naïve. But if we call ourselves conservatives then we should be first to conserve God's creation. Wise governors conserve resources. We honor God as creator and architect when we do so. We have no right to say, "It's mine and I'll do as I please." God is the owner, we are stewards, caretakers.

Surely, we want to leave resources - oil, copper - for the next generation. We want to conserve the beauty of the countryside and its fish, birds, animals.

We said that the speech of environmentalists can lead them astray, but ours can too. Example: We say things like, "The U.S. needs to produce more oil to gain energy independence." But do we really produce oil? We drill for it, pump it, refine it, ship it. Produce isn't wrong, but if we said find, refine, and ship it, we might remember that the oil is finite. We don't make oil, we find it and burn it. Maybe then we would be wiser in the way we use oil.

Maybe, yet maybe not. Here is the problem in Christian social action and reform. We shouldn't get too optimistic. Rather, earnest but wary. We are hard-working but sober-minded. The results are spotty: Yes, we essentially defeated the slave-trade. We made real progress toward universal literacy. We have made little progress on abortion. But what about creation care? Materialism and carelessness run deep. It's hard to know what will happen. We may keep burning oil till it's all gone. Or keep hunting and fishing species to extinction. Therefore let's remember that social action is good, but not saving. God is the Creator, Jesus is the Savior. Consider his first miracle and the promise it holds for renewal.

#### **4. Jesus promises to renew of recreation**

Jesus performed his first miracle at a wedding. During a wedding feast the wine ran out. This was a social disgrace and after his mother nudged him, Jesus decided to act. He turned the water in six large stone jars – thirty gallons each – into wine. When the steward tasted it, he said, "You have saved the best for last." This miracle celebrated life. The Lord satisfies our soul with good things. That includes food and drink at parties, which we receive as God's gifts.

John says this was Jesus' first sign manifesting his glory. By it, he started to gather disciples who believed in him. But how does this cause faith? Why would Jesus create wine? Because abundant wine is a symbol of the Messianic age. Amos 9:13-14 says, "The days are coming when new wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills." Jeremiah 31:12 agrees.

Jesus created abundant, excellent wine so Israelites would remember the prophecies of the age to come. Then God will recreate the world; it will flow with milk, honey, grain and wine. Jesus our good Savior King will lead us.

The Lord wants us to love and respect his creation – cherries and chameleons, mountains and music. Not worship it, but love it because we honor God who chose to make this world and redeem it. For creation groans at the present time. And we "who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:22-23). Thanks be to God for creation, redemption, and recreation.

So then we worship God the creator. We trust in Jesus the redeemer. We ask him to forgive our sins against creation, including involuntary sins. And we eagerly await his full redemption and the full renewal of creation. We yield to the Spirit, asking him to search us for sin and to lead us to see creation aright, and to view the whole creation in a God-centered way.