

And God was pleased

Genesis 1:1-25

April 7, 2013

Mission 4/1 Earth. We are now seven days into this special fifty-day mission effort that we have undertaken along with our sister churches in the United Church of Christ. It is called "Mission 4/1 Earth" -- "4" for the four holidays that delimit the fifty day period, Easter and Earth Day and Arbor Day and Pentecost, and "1" for one church acting together.

But the title is also a play on words, or, I should say, a play on numbers! It is a mission "for one" earth, a mission for the sake of this one earth on which we all live and upon which we all depend. As the United Church of Christ has advertised it, Mission 4/1 Earth is "a shared resurrection witness for Planet Earth during 50 great days of greening up, powering down, and shouting out for the environment. It is an opportunity to live out our faith -- in unity, as one church -- for the sake of our fragile planet Earth."

That's the plan, but our participation in it raises two important questions. First: Why should we care about the planet? And second: Why talk about it here, in church? Why should we care about the planet as people of God, as followers of Jesus, as Christians?

I hope the answer to the first question is obvious! It just makes sense! It is just common sense to take good care of this earth which is our home and which provides what is needed to nurture and sustain life.

What would happen to you if you stopped breathing? But what do you breathe? Where does the air you breath come from?

What would happen to you if you stopped drinking? But what do you drink? Where does the water you drink come from?

What would happen to you if you stopped eating? But what do you eat? Where does the food you eat come from?

The earth is the source of everything that is essential to life. If we spoil it -- if we poison the air, if we spoil the water supply, if we degrade the food supply -- we will die.

What if we allow the Amazon to be entirely de-forested? What if we totally fish out the oceans' groundfish? What if we continue unabated to release carbon into the atmosphere? We may not die, but our children's children's children, some future generation of our descendants, surely will.

The earth is our home, the home we share, and it only makes good sense to take care of it. But what about the second question? Why talk about it here in church? Aren't we concerned here, not with earthly matters, but with heavenly matters? With matters of the spirit, not matters of the body? Why should we care about the planet as people of God, as followers of Jesus, as Christians?

This is why ...

God commanded, "Let the water below the sky come together in one place, so that the land will appear" -- and it was done. God named the land "Earth," and the water which had come together God named "Sea." And God was pleased with what he saw. God commanded, "Let the earth produce all kinds of plants, those that bear grain and those that bear fruit" -- and it was done. So the earth produced all kinds of plants, and God was pleased with what he saw ...

And God was pleased with what he saw. Did you hear it? You know the story well, but did you hear it? Where are you in the story? Where am I in the story? In what Ross and I read of the story of God's creation of the universe, where are human beings?

Nowhere!

Don't worry, we're coming -- later. But ninety-two percent of the creation story is completed before we human beings make our appearance.

What has God made? Land and sky and sea and plants and birds and fish and animals of all kinds. And what does God think of what God has made? God was pleased! God was already pleased! God doesn't need us to be happy! God likes what he sees! It is good!

Don't worry, we're coming, and God likes us, too. We are created with a special identity, made in God's own image, and given a special purpose, to be like God in holiness, in goodness, and in love.

But listen carefully to the story. Creation itself was not made for us. It was made for God, to bring God pleasure, to bring God delight. We are made to bring God pleasure. We are made to bring God delight! And our role, as creatures -- creatures, created ones -- made in God's image, is to be like God, finding pleasure in the earth and caring for it.

This is the spiritual mandate to care for the earth. We care for the planet not only because it makes good sense, not only for our own sake and the sake of our children and our children's children, to protect and preserve the home, the resource, on which we all depend. No, as God's people, as people made to be like God, as believers, as followers of the risen Jesus, we care for the planet because it is precious, because it matters, in and of itself, and because it is right, because it is the right thing to do, the moral thing to do, the godly thing to do.

The world is not a stage, not just a stage upon which some human drama, some spiritual drama, is played out. No, this matters. Matter matters. This pleases God. This is what God was pleased to do. We care for the earth because God does, because it matters to God.

But, you say, this earth will one day pass away. Yes, it will. And so will you! Should I not care for you since your time is limited? Do I have no Christian duty to love you, since your days are numbered? You and I and all of creation are subject to decay, and God sent Jesus to save, God sent Jesus to redeem, you and me ... and all of creation!

God will, one day, make all things new -- you and me and all of creation!

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth disappeared, and the sea vanished. And I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared and ready, like a bride dressed to meet her husband. I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: "Now God's home is with people! God will live with them, and they shall be God's people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God."

When all things are made new, a new heaven and a new earth, where will we be? On earth!

When all things are made new, a new heaven and a new earth, where will God be? On earth! God's home will be with us! "Now God's home is with people" ... with us, here on earth!

What is it Jesus taught us to pray? "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Your will be done, on earth. May it be so. May God's will be done, here, on earth.