



“Environment”
*An Exercise Seeking
Christian Understanding*

Greenteam

St. Matthew Lutheran Church

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Proposal:

- That our faithful conduct with respect to the environment can be governed with a focus on the second part of Christ's 'dual commandment':
 - - Love God above all else;
 - - Love 'neighbor' as self....

If we act with "an excess of caution"
to limit risk of harm.

God is Bigger: Ideas for Receiving Scripture

1. **God is bigger** (e.g., than my possible understanding of God.)
2. **The big ideas about God often appear in tension**
3. **The Holy Spirit is the Teacher**
4. **Enter the story;** Recognize interpretive spiral: cycling between the Bible's setting and our own, gaining understanding.
5. **Interpret Scripture by Scripture** (~themes)
6. **See Faith as a fabric** (insights weaving together, depending on the full witness of Scripture.)
7. **Hold new ideas "in your heart" and ponder,**
(like Mary or the Disciples on the Road to Emmaus.)

Lutherish ideas: ~ Every Christian is a theologian.
~ Theology is struggle.

God as Creator



- **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen. 1:1)**

- *How?, When?, Why?*
- *Where is God?*



It was 'good.'

- God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that *it was good*. (Gen. 1:10)
- God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that *it was good*. (Gen 1:25)



Creation of Humankind

- Then God said, “Let us make mankind in *our* image, in *our* likeness, so that they may *rule over* the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in *his* own image, in the image of God he created them; *male and female he created them.* (Gen. 1:26, 27)



Evaluation

- God saw *all* that he had made, and it was *very* good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. (Gen. 1:31)



Blessing and Instructions

- God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

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. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” **And it was so. (Gen. 1:28-30)**

Genesis 2:

Adam and Eve and the Garden

- Then the Lord God *formed a man* from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.
- Now the Lord God had planted *a garden* in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. (Gen. 2:7-9)



Instructions

- “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” (Gen. 2:15-17)



Sin enters in

- “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” (Gen. 3:6,7)



A New Setup - 1

- To the woman [the Lord God] said,
- “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;
with painful labor you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you.”
- To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’
- “Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.
It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.
By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return.” (Gen. 3:16-19)



A New Setup - 2

- And the Lord God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. (Gen. 3:22-24)



Noah - 1

- But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded. (Gen. 8:1)
- So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on land—came out of the ark, one kind after another. Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again ... (Gen. 8: 18-21a)



Noah: Modified Instructions

- Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. *The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you.* Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. "But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. *I will demand an accounting from every animal.* And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being. (Gen. 9:1-5)
- "Whoever sheds human blood,
by humans shall their blood be shed;
for in the image of God
has God made mankind." (Gen. 9:6)



Noah: Instructions and Promise

- ... *As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.*"
- Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after *you and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth.* I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." (Gen. 9: 7-11)



Christ in Creation - 1

- In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1: 1-5.)



Christ in Creation - 2

- The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; *all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together* (Col. 1:15-17)
- The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, *sustaining all things by his powerful word*. ... (Hebrews 1:3)



In the Background

- I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. (Ro. 8: 18-21)



God's plan

- Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. **With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect *when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*** (Eph. 1 3-10)



John 3:16

- “For God so loved *the world* that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”
- 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, *but to save the world* through him. 18 *Whoever* believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.
- The Greek “cosmon” ~ “cosmos” = “World”



A Mystery ... in Jesus

- ... and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. (Eph. 3: 9-12.)



Still out there ...

- Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. (Mt. 10:29-31)



Hope → Action

- Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Rev. 21:1-5)



Faith → Hope → Action



**Even if I knew that tomorrow the
world would go to pieces, I would
still plant my apple tree.**

Martin Luther



Our Instructions - 1

- He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.
(Micah 6:8)



Our Instructions - 2

- One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”
- Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Mt. 22: 35-40)



Our instructions: beyond those

- - “love those who hate you”
- - “love one another as I have loved you.”
- Give of yourself to advance others.

(This still leaves the question of what it means to love God first and most.)

Beyond “Loving Others:”

Intergenerational Justice Principles (1 of 2)

(From a Nat. Academy of Public Administration Conference, later incorporated in Global Warming Conferences, beginning with Rio.)

- *Trustee Principle:* Every generation has obligations as trustee to protect the interests of future generations.
- *Chain of Obligation Principle:* Each generation’s primary obligation is to provide for the needs of the living and succeeding generations. Near-term concrete hazards have priority over long-term hypothetical hazards.

- Finger, H. (1999, May). *Deciding for the future: Balancing risks, costs, and benefits fairly across generations*. Statement at the 30th Annual National Conference on Radiation Control (Mesa, AZ, May 1998). <http://www.napawash.org>. (6 February 2000).

Beyond “Loving Others:”

Intergenerational Justice Principles (2 of 2)

(From a Nat. Academy of Public Administration Conference, later incorporated in Global Warming Conferences, beginning with Rio.)

- *Sustainability Principle:* No generation should deprive future generations of the opportunity for a quality of life comparable to its own.
- *Precautionary Principle:* Actions that pose a realistic threat of irreversible harm or catastrophic consequences should not be pursued unless there is some countervailing need to benefit either current or future generations.

- Finger, H. (1999, May). *Deciding for the future: Balancing risks, costs, and benefits fairly across generations*. Statement at the 30th Annual National Conference on Radiation Control (Mesa, AZ, May 1998). <http://www.napawash.org>. (6 February 2000). (See July 1997 entry by this title.)



The “Precautionary Principle”

- “Actions that pose a realistic threat of irreversible harm or catastrophic consequences should not be pursued unless there is some countervailing need to benefit either current or future generations.” (National Academy of Public Administration, 1997 ... one of four principles.)
- The **precautionary principle** (or **precautionary approach**) generally defines actions on issues considered to be uncertain ... The principle is used by policy makers to justify discretionary decisions in situations where there is the possibility of harm from making a certain decision (e.g. taking a particular course of action) when extensive scientific knowledge on the matter is lacking. The principle implies that there is a social responsibility to protect the public from exposure to harm, when scientific investigation has found a plausible risk. These protections can be relaxed only if further scientific findings emerge that provide sound evidence that no harm will result. (Wikipedia, accessed 2/2018)



ELCA Caring for Creation - 1

- The ***Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope and Justice*** social statement explains the ELCA's teachings on ecology and the environment, *grounded in a biblical vision of God's intention for the healing and wholeness of creation. This statement provides a Christian understanding of the human role to serve in creation, and a hope rooted in God's faithfulness to the creation from which humans emerge and depend upon for sustaining life. It provides a framework for understanding the human role in creation, the problem of sin and the current environmental crisis.*

Caring for Creation expresses a call to pursue **justice** for creation through active **participation, solidarity, sufficiency and sustainability**, and states the commitments of the ELCA for pursuing wholeness for creation — commitments expressed through individual and community action, worship, learning, moral deliberation and advocacy.



ELCA Caring for Creation - 2

- **Environment**

- Caring for God's creation is an ever evolving topic in this world, especially with each new natural or human-made disaster. **As stewards of this world, we are called to examine our behaviors toward creation.** While we need to take from the land for food and sustainability, we also need to be careful that we maintain good stewardship and do not exploit the wonderful things the earth provides.

The environment continues to be a focus of ELCA teachings and the church's advocacy work. There are many resources to help discern, learn and act on the different aspects of caring for creation. Search the following resources to learn about ELCA-related social teachings, resources for study and education, and ways to **get involved in actions that sustain and protect our environment and the resources God has entrusted to our use and care.**



Sources of Values related to *Justice* in Both Traditions

- God as Creator
- People made in God's Image
- God's separateness
- Humankind's purpose and limitations
- Scripture
- Focus on God's will
- Cont. of Community
- Interpretation in Com.
- Commandments (+/-)
- "Dignity of Man"
- Prophecy
- God's acts in history
- Personal models
- Responsibility (R&O)
- "Seek Justice"
- Help "the Poor"
- Expect a Good End

Sources of Values related to the Justice Both Traditions



- Concern for others (from previous list)
- Concern for future community
- Relation of God to Creation and humans
- Relation of humans to Creation (and vice-versa.)
- *Shalom/Peace, Wholeness*
- Stewardship
- “Sustainable development” fits.



Examples of Jewish Sources

- Covenant
- Torah
- Holiness
- Commandments (+/-)/
Mitzvoth
- Biblical story
- God's mercy: ***Hesed***
- Rabbinic commentary
- Particular Examples:
 - Nation/People/Land
 - ***Tikkun Olam***
("TQM")
 - Brotherhood of all
 - ***Shalom***
 - ***Yetzer ha Tov***
 - "golden rule"
 - ***Tzedakah/Chesedim***
 - The "Poor"...the Dead



Others from Christian Tradition

- Jewish roots
- Jesus' role
- Community united through time
- Jesus' sayings and actions
- Imitation of God
- Presence of God (HS)
- **Particularly:**
 - **dual commandment (love God above all and *neighbor as self*)**
 - **love of enemy**
 - **go beyond equity: sacrifice**
 - **vocation**
 - **virtues**
 - **Peace/Int. Hum. Ful.**
 - **"sufficient/sustainable livelihood for all"**
 - **the Common Good**
 - **providence**
 - **hope/trust**



for our Action

- Life has high value.
- Future life has value.
- Human capacity is limited.
- Some acts/intentions are prohibited.
- “Community” unites people past, present, future.
- Community transmits values across time.

- Particularly:

- **Intend to do good.**
- **Do not intend evil.**
- **Care about potential: responsibility.**
- **Be willing to do more than equity demands (from uncertain facts and from principle.)**
- **Steward to Creation.**
- **Build Common Good.**
- **Transmit values/vir.**
- **Act in faith.**

Here and There: The Glory of the Lord





All Creatures of Our God and King

"All creatures of our God and King, Lift up your voice with us and sing...
O burning sun with golden beam And silver moon with softer gleam....
O rushing wind and breezes soft, O clouds that ride the winds aloft...
O flowing waters, pure and clear, Make music for your Lord to hear...
Dear mother earth, who day by day Unfolds rich blessing on our way...
The fruits and flow'rs that verdant grow, Let them his praise abundant
show...

O everyone of tender heart....

And you, most kind and gentle death....

Let all things their Creator bless And worship God in humbleness.

Oh, praise him! Alleluia!

Oh, praise the Father, praise the Son, And praise the Spirit, Three in
One,...

Oh, praise him! Alleluia! {LBW: 527}

Around the yard





ALL CREATURES, WORSHIP GOD MOST HIGH

- All creatures, worship God most high!
Sound every voice in earth and sky:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Sing, brother sun, in splendor bright,
sing, sister moon and stars of night:
- Sing, brother wind; with clouds and rain
you grow the gifts of fruit and grain:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Dear sister water, useful, clear,
make music for your Lord to hear:
- Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,
alleluia, alleluia! {ELW 835}

Or on the subject of "trying":



- **Yoda said, "Do or do not, there is no try." How do you do something without trying to do it first?**
- **Where does "trying" fit in Christian Ethics?**