

## Sermon Discussion Information

Sermon Series: "Caring for Others Through Social Transformation"

Sermon Title: "Sustainability"

Sermon Text: Genesis 1-3; Revelation 21.

Listener's Journey: I want my listener to see the love of all living things as important as loving God and neighbor and find simple everyday ways to live more joyfully sustainable lives.

Unique Quotes from Sermon:

Seven in ten Americans say they "experience a connection to all life." More than six in ten believe that we need to address matters like climate change now to avoid more serious economic problems in the future. And, five in ten believe that people living in poorer countries will experience a great deal of harm due to climate change.<sup>1</sup> Yet, less than one in ten of Americans say climate change is the most important issues facing us today and less than three in ten Americans feel they will be personally impacted by climate change. It is also no secret that Americans comprise only 4% of the world's population and yet operate 1/3 of the world's automobiles and consume one quarter of the world's global energy supply.<sup>2</sup>

These gaps are reason enough for Americans to work on sustainability for ourselves and future generations of people coming after us. This should be reason enough for Christ followers to be leveraging what we believe from Christ's teachings that speak to, at a minimum, how our government's and corporate policies and personal lifestyles might be negatively impacting vulnerable populations here and around the world.<sup>3</sup> And, its just smart to protect and leverage the earth's ecosystems that provide us food, water, oxygen, beauty, peacefulness, and splendor.

It is also our practice, as Protestant Christians, to frame a theological understanding for everything that we do, and sustainability is no exception. There are many transferable archetypes in Scripture that speak to sustainability. And, by transferable archetype, I mean a broad conceptual idea that has relevance in every age. Jesus' teachings fit the sustainability theme because he commanded us to love our neighbors, do unto others as we would have them do to us, and be good stewards of all that we have been given, which of course means all living things and the planet itself.

More generally, the Biblical narrative speaks to sustainability in that it is provocatively book ended by transferable archetypes with human origins beginning in a garden and ending in a city. And, in-between the books of Genesis and Revelation we see that, across the sweep of Scripture and in addition to the famous Scriptural imperative to love God and love neighbor, there is a third love: *the love of all living things*. There is a word for that, by the way.

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The mystical exchange between the first people, both female and male, and a speaking serpent, unfurl the tragic spiral of deceit that leads to violence that leads to more deceit that leads to more violence. And, the net result of Genesis chapter three is broken trust between God and humans, humans and humans, and humans and the soil.

Genesis 3:17b-19:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ppri.org/research/believers-sympathizers-skeptics-americans-conflicted-climate-change-environmental-policy-science/> (accessed 3-18-17)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/US/9910/12/population.cosumption/> (accessed 3-18-17)

<sup>3</sup> Jesus' commands to love our neighbors (Mk. 12:30-31), do unto others as we would have them do unto us (Lk. 6:31), care for "the least of these" (Mt. 25:40, 45), and be proper stewards of His creation (Lk. 12:42-48; Col. 1:16).

“Cursed is the ground because of you;  
through painful toil you will eat food from it  
all the days of your life.  
<sup>18</sup> It will produce thorns and thistles for you,  
and you will eat the plants of the field.  
<sup>19</sup> 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.”

#### Genesis 3:17b-19. NIV

This text is an important reminder that just as there is a breach between God and one another exists, so is there a broken relationship between us and the ground, or more holistically framed, us and the entire ecosystems of our planet.

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Rublev's visualization of the paradox of the Trinity is richly layered. And, while being more than 600 years old, it remains as one of the best visual guides the Christian tradition has to help us ponder the triune understanding of God, a bedrock aspect of the Christian faith. And, as we ponder what it means to be reconciled to God, one another, and the earth, the Trinitarian framework helps us see that everything really is connected. And, as we will now turn in looking at the end of the Bible, our work, alongside the work of the Creator, is to “make all things become new.”

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Looking across Revelation broadly, many biblical scholars and pastors alike see the Revelation images such as throngs of diverse people from every nation before God, and the notion of heaven descending down to a new earth, as closely tied ideas to the archetype in the Lord's Prayer taught by Jesus to his disciples, “may your kingdom come, and will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”<sup>4</sup> And, *that* it is the role of the Christ follower--to be a part of ushering in the generous grace filled values of Christ's kingdom in our time, and with and through, our love of all living things.

The Bible's movement from beginning in a garden and ending with the Revelation 21 image of a city is very intriguing. Not the least because of the massive population shifts to urban centers in our time, bringing important environmental concerns to the built environment in our city centers in particular. The United Nations predicts that by 2050 about 64% of the developing world and 86% of the developed world will be urbanized.<sup>5</sup> So, how we design and build density in our cities is a matter of critical importance for people of faith who want people and the environment to flourish.

#### Three Discussion Questions:

1. How important is sustainability and the environment to you? What do you know about critical issues? (Personal sharing)
2. Why do some believe the Bible is at odds with “green” matters? (Exploring the text)
3. What are some small ways that you can reduce environmental impacts in your life ? (Direct application)

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 6.

<sup>5</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urbanization> (accessed 3-18-17)