

“Caretakers, Co-creators and Collaborators with God”

Genesis 1:26-31

April 24, 2022

“For the trees had almost gone and the bees had almost gone and the creatures in their shells by the seas had almost gone...” Ella read for us, from the book When We All Stopped. Some of the most moving videos I have seen in the past few years show people interacting with nature in ways long forgotten, communicating with animals while they rescue them from danger, free them from nets, and it is so moving to see the creatures’ patience during, and their gratitude after being shown such care. I love videos of humans protecting and watching the hatching of baby turtles on beaches newly cleaned, after a generation or two of littering. I love watching videos of humans caring for bees and butterflies, creating and protecting habitats for their feeding and nesting, to ensure their survival. One of my favorite videos is one of a woman who keeps and feeds an injured bumble bee without wings. Let’s watch this short video now:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dW-AiN2IKDM&ab_channel=TheDodo

You don’t have to look long or far to find a story about environmental degradation. In fact, if you just check in your memory, no matter how old you are, you can identify ways in which our yards, fields, parks, and community have been changed by the diminishment of wild creatures or wild plants and spaces in the neighborhood. I remember in my childhood catching fireflies and seeing dozens and dozens lighting up ours and our neighbors’ yards. Now I only ever see a few in each yard. I loved to wander in a little woods a few blocks from our house in my childhood, and saw a salamander there one day. The little woods were less than a square block, completely surrounded by our neighborhood, but it was an island of wilderness in our midst. I can remember miles of farmland between Joliet and Bolingbrook and Naperville when I would drive to college; and miles of farmland between Maple Park and Elburn in the 80s. I remember seeing a sky full of stars from my backyard in Joliet as a child. I remember seeing bugs in the yard, and some in my house as a child, not so much either place anymore or much fewer varieties. I remember seeing lots of wildlife at state and national parks when camping as a child; now they are few and hard to find.

The chair of one of my former church’s environmental justice committees, a master gardener no less, shocked me when I suggested that we could encourage folks to plant native plants in their yards, to create more habitats suitable for rabbits and other wild creatures. She protested, “Not in our yards!” So I just said, “But then where are

they to live? We are taking all their homes and habitat!” What do you remember of nature in your childhood? How have our land and water and sky changed since you were young?

On Earth Day this year the The Lorax turned 52 and 51 years old, respectively. The Lorax was written by Dr. Seuss in response to the first Earth Day, in fact. When We All Stopped, the book Pastor Rob and Ella read, was written and illustrated during the pandemic by a brother and sister; the brother was one of the architects of the Paris Climate Agreement. These two books warn us, and encourage us, to care a whole lot more for the earth, and to use our powers to repair the damage we’ve done. As our world and its creatures continue to be diminished, we are witnesses to their losses and deaths...but we could choose to be more. We could choose to not just perform their funerals; we could choose to be part of their resurrection, to be part of their rebirth, and their new creation.

Our Genesis text tells the story of God’s vision for our partnership with God in caring for this beautiful creation: we, created in God’s image and come alive with God’s breath, are invited to become caretakers, co-creators, and collaborators with God in developing this beautiful earth with all its creatures on land, in the sea, and in the air. The word “dominion” in the original Hebrew, means to take responsibility for somethings’ well-being and development, not its exploitation or abuse. We humans and animals are all given plants to eat, and we are all, even the land as well, instructed to rest on the 7th day of each week, the Sabbath. In addition, every 7th year, the land and creatures and people are to rest: everyone gets to rest from laboring to produce food, and are to live from the bounty produced, the land “gone wild”, and from whatever is saved from prior harvests. There is a rhythm and an abundance built into God’s creation – seasons and weather and richness to earth, producing cycles of life after rest, life after death. The decay of leaves hosts the birth of pollinator insects, and becomes food for the earthworms, which produce nutrients to grow healthier crops, which grow into food for livestock and humans. We are created with freedom to become more, and to flourish within our web of interdependence. Do you remember learning these lessons of interdependence, the connections between the different parts of the web of our lives here?

In Exodus and Leviticus, we learn how the Israelite farmers and shepherds are to care for land, livestock, and each other to ensure the well-being and safety of all in their nation. They are to help each other care for injured livestock and they are to observe the

Sabbath with their livestock. The poor are to have the crop leftovers, whatever is left grown around the edges of the farmers fields; and even immigrants are to be cared for and allowed to observe a sabbath day of rest. From the Prophets we learn about God's anger when livestock, land, and people are abused: when pastures are trampled, and water is muddied so that flocks suffer, when food can no longer grow on the land, when shepherds don't look after their sheep but allow them to scatter and they are destroyed. Jesus reminds us that he and God are our good shepherd: they rescue the lost, protect us, and call us by name. Jesus reminds us too, in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 6, that God certainly cares for us and our needs, because look how well God dresses the lilies and clothes the grass, how well God feeds the birds who do not grow or store up their own food; God knows our needs too and provides for us abundantly! We can easily see how abundance is written and repeated throughout God's web design of life in our world. Look how many seeds a sunflower produces, how many acorns an oak produces...there is abundance enough for all to be blessed and cared for, many times over. Only we, of all the species, have been able to totally disrupt and destroy so many of the links and components of the web, so that it is now malfunctioning on so many levels. But we can also repair much of the damage we have created.

I invite you to turn to the inside back cover of your bulletin where it says NOTES; our friends online please grab a pen and paper! As I share with you some questions and ideas, I invite you to jot down ideas and reminders to yourself, for ways that you can speak for and save the trees and bees, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea.

First, what do you do to care for the land and its creatures? The trees and the brown barbaloots, as Dr. Seuss writes...

Can you plant native plants, bushes and trees to harbor and feed wildlife? Flowers for pollinator insects and birds? Can you buy produce from organic farms? We have several near here! And buy pasture-raised meats from regenerative farms? There are several of these not far from here. Can you leave your leaves in the fall through the spring to help pollinator insects survive? Can you NOT use chemical pesticides, fertilizers and weedkillers, or use only organic versions, to help restore pollinator populations and de-toxify our land and water systems? Can you volunteer with local parks, forest preserves, organic farms and wildlife rehab organizations to support their work?

Secondly, what do you do to care for the waters and their creatures? The humming fish swimming in our gluppity-glup, as Dr. Seuss writes...

Can you stop using straws, plasticware, and plastic bags? Take your own shopping bags and wash your own dishes and silverware! Much of our waste is ending up in the ocean as our landfills fill up, and fish, birds and whales are all dying, full of our plastic waste. Can you buy recycled paper, recycle your glass jars, compost your paper and food waste so less waste goes to our oceans? Can you use sand not salt in winter, flush less, shower shorter, and launder your clothes less, to conserve and not pollute our drinking water? Can you volunteer to help clean up local rivers, beaches and lakes?

Lastly, what do you do to care for the air and its creatures? The swomee swans singing and choking in our skies, writes Dr. Seuss...

Can you drive less, and carpool more? Take public transportation or bike or motorcycle to work? Can you shop local and ship less, so we deploy fewer trucks, trains, and cargo ships that pollute? Can you unplug appliances more, and turn inside and outside lights off at night? Can you put solar panels on your house or business, and give any extra power to the grid for others to use, so we burn less coal and gas? Can you create a woods or hamlet in your yard, with water and trees as sources for birds and creatures to rest and nest? Can you volunteer to help with bird counts and help protect and grow park and wild areas for resting and nesting sites of migrating or local birds?

What more can we do, to take care of all of God's creatures, to hear all their voices singing in the earth's choir? There are many signs of hope to see these days as well: as we watched the air around cities clear during the pandemic when we began driving less; as we watched creatures come back to habitats when we were absent for a while, when we and our neighbors began to enjoy parks and gardens more and planted some things and fed the birds. There is hope when we see more people and companies, even states banning the use of straws and plastic bags; when we see more companies and churches switching to "green" lighting fixtures, greener plumbing fixtures, when we see more Tree Cities, more wildlife corridors being created, more regenerative farms being created.

Before you leave today, share your notes with your neighbor as you have coffee in Fellowship Hall. Get some more ideas for living more sustainable from our Creation Care tables in Fellowship Hall; pick up a reusable straw; sign up to help plant a garden at Hased House; take and deliver a box or bag of materials to be recycled or upcycled from our Rummage Sale!

We have a choice. We are asked to be caretakers, co-creators, collaborators with God and Christ, to bring blessing and fruitfulness to all of creation. Now, we must also be the voice for the voiceless, to not only change our lives, but to speak up for changes in

our churches, in our communities, in our companies, in our world. We need to allow all creatures to have a safe home, safe food, and safe water to live. For, “unless someone like us cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better, it’s not.” Writes Dr. Seuss prophetically, 51 years ago.

May God bless us and fill us and use us for this great work of creation, and re-creation, to heal and bless the earth and all of us living within. May the whisper of hope within and around us become a rousing chorus of celebration for our earth’s renewal!
Amen!

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