

Genesis 1:1-2:4a
Psalm 8

2 Corinthians 13:11-13
Matthew 28:16-20

I'm just curious. Have you heard of the Paris climate accord? Is it safe to say there has been a bit of a controversy about the Paris climate agreement lately? It was an agreement of 195 countries to begin reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The controversy is that President Donald Trump announced recently that the United States was going to withdraw from the accord. Following China, the United States has the second largest total greenhouse emissions. Well, I'm not going to get into the politics of whether climate change is a fact—although I think it is a fact—nor whether humanity had contributed to climate change—although I think we have. The only snarky political statement I am going to say is that I am glad our politicians know more about climate change than our scientists! Regardless of what our leaders have done, we need to remember that as Christians we are to be stewards of God's creation, and we have a responsibility to care for God's creation.

Christian stewardship requires responsible management of all of God's gifts to us, including the gift of God's creation. We must care for creation. At the 2016 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, there was an overture to add "caring for God's creation" to the list of what it means to be a faithful member, a faithful disciple, in our *Book of Order*, the constitution of the Presbyterian Church. That overture has overwhelmingly passed by our presbyteries and takes effect on June 25. The passage of that amendment is timely. We are to care for creation. Perhaps it is time for the Christian church to reassert itself as a community of advocacy. Can we speak out for the defense of the earth and its inhabitants?

In this creation account, God instructs us "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." To subdue creation and to have dominion over it does not mean that we can do whatever we want to do with our air, water, and land. It demands responsibility. Dominion is to be marked by a high sense of responsibility toward the things that God declared good. Six times in this creation account, "God saw that what God was creating was good," and in conclusion of the creation account we read, "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good." Not just good, but very good! The church needs to speak out for the defense of the earth and its inhabitants, to speak out in defense of God's very good creation.

Humanity does not have a good track record when it comes to the environment. We have not done a very good job. Approximately forty percent of the lakes in America are too polluted for fishing, aquatic life, or swimming. Every year more people in the world die from unsafe water than from all forms of violence, including war. Eighty-eight percent of the earth's ocean surface is now polluted. There are 46,000 pieces of plastic per square mile of ocean surface. One million sea birds and 100,000 marine mammals are killed annually from plastic in our oceans. Ninety-two percent of the world's population live in places where air pollution exceeds safe limits. It is estimated that the Amazon rainforest is vanishing at a rate of 20,000 square miles a year. Rainforests recycle carbon dioxide into oxygen, and more than twenty percent of the world's oxygen is produced in the Amazon rainforest. We cannot continue going in this direction.

We have made significant changes and reductions in emissions with federal and state regulations and our own personal efforts. We do not see the smog in Los Angeles or New York City that we did decades ago. Farmers and ranchers are making efforts to reduce pollutants. Urban people are reducing the chemicals they dump on their lawns. Corporations, some on their own volition are reducing emissions.

As stewards we need to be responsible for the gift of God's creation. Creation is a gift that God has given us, and we need to be good stewards of creation. The Boy Scouts have a principle called "Leave No Trace." Another way of saying that is to "leave it like you found it," or better yet, "Leave it better than you found it." This value respects the rights of other users of the outdoors as well as future generations. Perhaps this should be our awareness and attitude as Christians in caring for creation. We should leave creation as God created it, not polluted and exploited.

Our stewardship must exhibit a concern for future generations. Do we not have a responsibility to future generations? Are we not concerned about the world, God's creation, that we are handing off to our children and their children, to our descendants? 12-year-old Severn Suzuki, addressing a plenary session of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, said, "I'm fighting for my future. Losing your future is not losing a few points on the stock market I'm only a child and I don't have all the solutions, but I want you to realize, neither do you. You don't know how to fix the holes in the ozone layer. You don't know how to bring back an animal now extinct. If you don't know how to fix it, please stop breaking it." We hear from politicians and corporations that we cannot afford to reduce our emissions or limit our pollution. It costs too much. Prices for electricity and gas and will go up with pollution controls. Isn't an overriding concern our children, our

descendants? Will we leave for our descendants God's creation as we found it? Will the world we give to them be inhabitable? Is it being a good steward of God's creation?

It is not going to be an easy job. As someone once said, "How are we to tend the garden - care for the whole earth - when we can't keep our lawns mowed and our gutters cleaned?" We can start small, and small changes do add up, if we all do our part. One helpful suggestion is that we "refuse, reduce, reuse, repurpose, and recycle."

Refuse: Many events have vendors giving away free things. If you will use it take it. But if it is going to end up in the trash, say no thanks. At the store if you bought only an item or two, say no to the plastic bag.

Reduce: There is an internet site where you can sign up to reduce your junk mail. Our recycling bin here gets filled with junk mail. Replace light bulbs with LEDs that use less electricity. Lincoln Electric Service replaced all of the incandescent light bulbs in our church with LEDs, saving energy usage. Buy energy efficient appliances and fuel saving vehicles. Walk more. Bike more. Ride the bus.

Reuse: Use reusable items instead of disposable. Use a reusable mop head instead of disposable mop heads. Wash dishes instead of using Styrofoam plates.

Repurpose: Repurpose the glass pickle jar for storing your screws and bolts.

Recycle: Recycle. Up to 50% of trash can be recycled instead of filling our landfills. The city of Lincoln buries about 19,000 tons of cardboard in our landfill every year!

Refuse, reduce, reuse, repurpose, and recycle. And God saw that it was very good!

Thanks be to God
through Jesus Christ our Lord.