

Guard the Good Treasure: What Does It Mean to Be Green?

Based on Thinking Big by Anna Woofenden, Christian Century, Aug. 10/22

Lamentations 3:19-26, Luke 17:5-10, 2 Timothy 1:1-14 by Patty Friesen (Oct. 2/22)

Sing: All Creatures

This first Sunday of October is often celebrated as Creation Care Sunday as it remembers St. Francis of Assisi's death on October 3. St. Francis saw God's presence in birds and animals and rivers and trees. In England, they have a blessing of the animals today. Everyone brings their pets to church for a blessing. I thought that would be neat to have Maple, Hermione, Black Shadow, Spirit, Lucky, Nova and a few of Harold and Lloyd's unnamed cows come to church for a blessing or absolution but maybe next year's St. Francis Sunday. Francis had a vivid sense of the sacramentality of creation. All things, whether living or inanimate, reflected their Creator's love and were thus due reverence and wonder. In this spirit he composed his famous Canticle of Creation in 1224 that we just sang. Altogether his life and his relationship with the world including animals, poor and sick people, women as well as men, represented the breakthrough of a new model of human and cosmic community that is all one in Christ.

St. Francis shows us that care for the earth is not separate from our life as Christians. Care for creation arises out of that we believe in God as our Creator. It all starts there in Genesis 1 and we live out our love of God, creation and each other in worship and in lifestyle. We wrote down our favourite places in creation as we came into the sanctuary. God's love in our favourite places sustains us emotionally and spiritually. Our natural places love us in how they steady and sustain us, teach us, shelter us, guide us, feed us. That old image of mother Earth reminds us that we

depend upon the unearned bounty of the biosphere. So, in a sense, in learning to love the Earth and our favourite places in it, we are learning to love back what loved and sustained us all along. (Barry Lopez, essays, xv)

Our times spent in creation become acts of devotion to God, become our worship. By paying attention to all God has created around us, we become open to what God might be trying to say to us on a hike or in the garden: open to epiphany and rapture and communion with our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. I've had my clearest moments of seeking and discernment on walks and hikes. I remember a hike along the coast in Oregon trying to discern if I should leave paradise to go to the hot cornfields of Indiana for seminary. While brutally hard to do, it felt clear I should go. Spending time with God outside grows our relationship in a continuous, respectful attendance to the presence of the Divine. It is a way of greening our faith.

We enter the natural world mindfully, reverently, as silently as we can, waiting for the beauty, intricacy, and wonder of what is outside us to hush the barrage inside us (McClaren, *Do I Stay Christian*, p.179). Lamentations 3:26 says, It is good that we should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. In creation, we learn to be quiet and patient and pay attention as we wait for an animal or bird to appear. As Meister Eckhart says, "a person who knows creatures never need to attend any sermons, for every creature is full of God and is a book." Rick Driediger, manager of Churchill River Canoe Outfitters has a saucy T-shirt that says I'd rather be canoeing thinking about God, than sitting in church thinking about canoeing. Some of us may resonate with that this morning – we'd rather actually be in creation thinking about God than in church talking

about creation. But I hope we are all encouraged by our testimonies of our experiences of God in creation at camp or on holidays or in our backyard or balcony.

We learn a lot about creation when we return to our favourite spots over and over to know them under many conditions. Richard Nelson, an Alaskan writer and anthropologist says, I do not recall a single day of attentiveness outdoors when something unknown, something new hasn't flared up before me. You pay attention and you are paid back with joy and knowledge through the process. Learning is a holy and exhilarating mission...Loneliness is transmuted into connection with God, nature and others and what was broken is made whole. (Lopez, xx)

Like St. Francis' canticle of creation, what would our own personal canticle of creation sound like? Mine would sound like: My soul is renewed with joy, when I sit in my backyard and watch the goldfinches in the sunflowers, alleluia. It is also renewed when walk along the river, alleluia. The osprey hovers and drops for fish, the chipmunks chew down the dandelion stalks and coyotes run along the shore, alleluia. Occasionally we see a fox, deer, rabbits and snakes. Then there was the time Patrick ran into a moose and the time we saw a porcupine in the tree, alleluia. We connect with God and with each other along the river, alleluia, alleluia.

Our gospel reading asks if we have done what we ought in following Christ. The parable of the worthless servant is probably no one's favourite, yet it drives us to reexamine our assumptions about our relationship to God. The difficulty is that while the parable makes a significant point about discipleship and humility before God, it casts God in the unappealing role of a slave driver. Most of us probably would choose a different metaphor.

The disciples respond to Jesus' elevated admonitions to live by a kingdom ethic, with a plea that conveys their surprise, dismay, and sense of inadequacy in the face of such a high standard: "Increase our faith!" The disciples' plea in this context conveys the recognition that on the one hand faith is a dynamic process and one can grow in faith. On the other hand, the disciples ask that the Lord add to or strengthen their faith, thereby recognizing that faith is not just a matter of our own strength.

The reader may expect that Jesus would warmly receive the disciples' request for more faith. Instead, his sharp answer implies that they have not really understood the nature of genuine faith. The disciples say, "Increase our faith," assuming that what they need is more faith, but Jesus' answer declares that they have misunderstood. The point is not that they need more faith; rather, they need to understand that even little faith enables God to work in a person's life in ways that defy ordinary human experience. Jesus assures the disciples that with even a little faith they can live by his teachings on discipleship. What does our discipleship require of us these days of creation care?

Last Sunday after potluck, we met with Mark Bigland-Pritchard, the Mennonite St. Francis of Saskatoon to dream of greening our faith and church. Despite being an activist, Mark is a spiritual guy and his work begins with prayer and mindfulness. He knows the work cannot be sustained without it. We affirmed what we are already doing at church. We already buy fairly traded organic coffee and wash coffee cups rather than using styrofoam. We've switched to LED and electric trimmers. We recycle paper in the office and try to print double sided. Trustee Bill is after all of us to turn off the lights and turn down the heat after leaving the building! We dreamed big - like solar panels big - on that big beautiful south facing slanted roof. The sun will give us all the

electricity we use in this big building and we talked about donating our \$500 gov't cheques for the project. What do the rest of you think about that?

We can do so much more together than on our own. How can creation care be woven into every aspect of church life? Being a green church can become a way of life, an energizing, creative, life-giving way of being church as we saw last Sunday at our Think Tank. We have to work together and be kind to each other while challenging and calling our community forward in the greening process. A green church weaves care of creation into every aspect of its life together, from outdoor worship, to committee work to Sunday School, to public witness and advocacy. A green faith calls us to the work of loving neighbours and creation while being followers of Christ in the world with even a little bit of faith.

Which leads us to green evangelism – sharing the good news and I dare say, solar panels would be a pretty big sign to the world that we care and I would go to a church that had solar panels. So I invite our Face bookers to also contribute to our solar panel project and come see what else we have planned and need help with. Our youth are focused on creation care at school and they will lead us in these efforts. In the spirit of greening our faith, if any youth or adults had an encounter with God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit this summer at camp or youth conference or in your backyard or wherever and you want to be baptized into a green faith and a green community – please let me or Zach or one of the deacons know and we'll get you wet with unpolluted water. We need your help on this journey. I will close with a prayer from Mennonite Church Canada.

God of creation

*We come to you this season recognizing that you are the Creator,
and we open our eyes to the beauty that fills the creatures,
the land, the air and the water.*

*You are Creator not only of humankind,
but of all that graces this planet and this universe.*

God of these days

*In this time of climate change, we recognize that we are blessed by what you have
made,*

while also dependent on how that creation is cared for.

God of peace

We ask your guidance for how to honour your creation in these challenging times.

*We humbly open our hearts and minds to what we can do to be your instruments of
peace,*

*in helping to make the global Anabaptist church a community that people can point to
and say*

– they are taking creation care seriously; they are faithful Christians.

God of assurance

Thank you for the assurance that you are with us in this journey.

Renew our spirits, as we work to renew our common home.

We offer our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen