

GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH
SUNDAY, AUGUST 22, 2021

Caring for God's Creation



nativityonline.org

Sermon Notes:

Even heretics have something good to say every now and then. Pelagius was declared a heretic at the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD for his rejection of the doctrine of sin; yet he spoke wisely when he wrote: *“When Jesus commands us to love our neighbors, he does not only mean our human neighbors; he means all of the animals and birds, insects and plants, amongst whom we live.”*

Today's theme is that God has equipped us to care for creation. That God has given us everything we need to tend and till and renew this beautiful world we've been given and are blessed to live in.

I heard a talk in the 1990's about God giving the church all the gifts that we need to do God's work in the world. At the time, I was serving a little tiny church that was struggling to get everything taken care of and I said to God:



@CreationCareWNC

“Ok, you might have given us everything we need but we sure seem to be a little bit lacking here!” But even though the church had trouble finding a piano player and someone willing to write the checks to pay the bills, they still managed to share God's love with one another, to hear God's Word and celebrate God's sacraments and to tend to the needs of their neighbors. They didn't have everything I wanted them to have but maybe they had everything they needed.

I feel a bit like that when it comes to care of creation. It's so easy to see our shortcomings and to focus on the problems, especially in a year like this with fires and droughts and storms. It is so easy to get our eyes glued to what's wrong. Now, we need to know what's wrong with ourselves and with our world in order to repent, to turn, to change...that's the whole doctrine of sin that we do confess and believe.

In our prayer, which we pray time and time again, in every worship service and at home, we pray “thy kingdom come, thy will be done.” In confirmation class, we talk about how in the small catechism, Luther teaches that God’s kingdom will come, with or without us, but we pray in this prayer that we might be part of bringing about the good that God wants. And God’s will shall be done, with or without us, but in this prayer, we pray that we might be able to be aligned with God’s will; that we might live and move and work in a way that will be pleasing to God and further God’s work in the world. We know we sin and fall short and that God will forgive us, but we do not just carelessly do stupid things. I remember a comment in a small group discussion when I was at seminary. A woman in my group said: “I’m not worried about nuclear war! I believe that if we drop the bombs, God is going to reach out his hand and catch them.” That was the most horrifying and terrifying thing I’ve ever heard. From beginning to end, from Adam and Eve in the garden, to Jesus’ death on the cross, God is very consistent at not saving us from our poor, foolish and destructive decisions. Adam and Eve had to leave the garden, and death and toil and suffering came into the world. Jesus paid the price for us, but it was a hard, hard price. From the people of Israel, worshipping the golden calf and grumbling about the food, to David and his consequences for taking Bathsheba, to the nation as addressed by the prophets, there have been consequences for human wrong doing. I do not see any evidence in the Bible of the kind of God that would reach out and catch the bomb. Just no.

And so it is with our world. We pay the price for our mistakes. God has equipped us to do much good as well. We have so many gifts. So many gifted people, so many great minds, so many tools at our hands, to turn towards constructive use. Towards care and repair and preservation. Last week I talked about two stories of how human ingenuity was put to work at the Berkeley Pit in Butte through the water treatment and the successful efforts to scare away the birds. It seems to me, that if we as a people can figure out how to put a man on the moon and develop a vaccine against a killer virus in record time, we have been equipped. We have skills and abilities to look at the problems of the world, to seek solutions, to implement solutions. The question is do we have the will? “What are we going to do? What are we willing to give? What are we willing to give up? Those are questions yet to be answered. God has blessed us with amazing gifts. As God’s creative, ingenious children, what direction will we go? How will we use those gifts we have been given?

Seminary professor Cláudio Carvalhaes in a commentary on “Working Preacher” said “... the earth is also on a path of brutal destruction... The sea is loaded with plastic and garbage that result from our consumerism, and overfishing depletes seas and lakes. Forests are turned into deserts, not proper for habitation much less for spiritual development. The earth... is rushing toward us, asking to be healed. Every tree is asking us for support, every lake is crying... every fish is begging to survive, every bird is singing to remind us of our place in creation. We have so much to do, as Jesus says... Without a strong spiritual life, oriented by daily spiritual practices of prayer and meditation, of pause and loneliness, we cannot do all the work we need to do and we cannot be all that we are called to be. A heart without action is ineffective, and an action without a heart is empty. Jesus is calling us to have a compassionate heart and to do strong actions of justice. Both things! Together!”

We pray “Our Father in heaven”. Our God, who loves us as a parent, who created all that is and was and ever will be; “thy kingdom come, thy will be done.” Help us to work with the wisdom and courage, with creativity and imagination, with passion and compassion, that your world may be healed. Amen.