

“The Kingdom of Heaven on Earth”

A Sermon by Jon Dodson

“In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being.” John 1:1-3.

The Word. It’s there in the beginning, it’s with God, and it is God. And all things were made through it. Now, I want to borrow a concept from Holmes Rolston III, University Distinguished Professor of philosophy at Colorado State University, who was the 2003 Templeton Prize recipient.

All of us have a biological code within us. DNA. It has shaped us and all living things. Scientifically, when looking at the origins of life and the divergence to multiple species, we can recognize evolution at work. A shift, a jump, a movement from one species to another. And it is DNA that allows this process to take place.

So we have DNA, this code of life, but we also have the Bible telling us of God’s word in creation. Rolston, at this point, takes from the original Greek Bible. From the book of John, ‘in the beginning was the *Logos*’ – the Word, the instruction, the information. DNA is information. God’s word is DNA. The DNA that resided in one-celled life forms of primordial earth, that allowed them to evolve, and continues to live in us. All things were made through God, who is the word. All things are God’s.

I grew up at First Congregational Church in Colorado Springs, but I grew in my faith at La Foret, our conference and retreat center for the Rocky Mountain conference of the United Church of Christ. I first went to camp there in third grade, and I have gone every summer since, from camper to counselor. La foret sits in the middle of the Black Forest, a Ponderosa Pine ecosystem just north of Colorado Springs. What is amazing to me is how a landscape has shaped my life. My first concepts of God were the trees and how they listen, the birds and how they sing, and even the rainbows after the rain. Being outdoors there, even looking out the windows here in the sanctuary, gives me a feeling that all this was created to be Heaven.

I want to read for you a poem by Denver native Helen L. Marshall (who is one of my favorites:

-A Heaven Every Day –
What wondrous miracles abound
In ordinary things.
And yet how casually we sing
And hear a world that sings.
A rosebud bursts its prison pod
And fragrance fills the air –
The tender grasses break the sod
And green is everywhere.

A daisy lifts its dazzling smile
To blue skies high above –
The maiden plucks the petals off

And dreams of her true love.
A baby takes a faltering step –
A brave soul smiles through pain.
The summer dies – the white snow flies
And spring is born again.

A universe of miracles,
So very commonplace
We take them all for granted
And accept with careless grace.
With wistful eyes we visualize
A Heaven far away,
The while we stumble blindly through
A Heaven every day.

I like to believe that if God resides in Heaven, then we, the likeness of God, live in the likeness of Heaven. Yet, if the word of God lives in us, then is this not the Kingdom of God? In the Lords Prayer we say “Our Creator, who art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.” The Kingdom of Heaven on earth. We make of this world what we want.

My father was talking to me this week, and we were discussing Earth Day. He told me that my mother and him were married the same year Earth day was first celebrated. His hope and the hope of those that first celebrated earth day was that if people became aware of environmental issues, we would move towards being stewards of the earth, and not abusers. While our progress in this has been slow, the hope still remains strong. To me, being a steward of the earth is honoring the earth, and in that, honoring the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven.

John Calvin, the French church reformer who lived from 1509 to 1564, said, “Let him who possesses a field, so partake of its yearly fruits, that he may not suffer the ground to be injured by his negligence; but let him endeavor to hand it down to posterity as he received it, or even better cultivated. Let him so feed on its fruits that he neither dissipates it by luxury, nor permits it to be marred by neglect. Moreover, ... let everyone regard himself as the steward of God in all things which he possesses. Then he will neither conduct himself dissolutely, nor corrupt by abuse those things which God requires to be preserved.”

Psalms 24:

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it.

All life has a holy connection to each other, a force that cannot separate humans from the rest of creation. We may be of an evolved intelligence, but we are of the same word, the same creator, and the same earth.

There's a phrase that you may have seen here, at the church, or on bumper stickers. It goes something like, 'Join in the struggle for the integrity of creation'. “The integrity of creation is a theological assertion that the non-human parts of God's creation have worth, value and purpose in their own right. Their value is not dependant on human use, or on our economic valuations.” And “The integrity of creation stands in opposition to the theological assertion that the rest of the creation is simply the "stage" where the drama of God's salvation of humanity is acted out.” [lexicon, eco-justice.org]

As humans we have the power to control and shape our environment. I want introduce to Peter Sawtell, a man who has created a wonderful ministry called Eco-Justice. I would encourage all of you to check it out online at eco-justice.org. “Eco-Justice Ministries is an independent, ecumenical agency that helps churches answer the call to care for all of God's creation, and develop ministries that are faithful, relevant and effective in working toward social justice and environmental sustainability.” Take a look at what he is doing for God's creation. Also he has things that Congregations and individuals can do. Our church does a few things to help, like offering fair-trade coffee, but still there is a lot more we can do. Wondering what we can do as individuals, Sawtell has suggested 7 rules for responsible consumption which are also online:

Seven Rules for Responsible Consumption

1. Give special attention to major purchases
2. Become a weight watcher (heavier products generally have higher environmental impacts)
3. Analyze your consumption quantitatively
4. Don't worry or feel guilty about unimportant decisions
5. Look for opportunities to be a leader
6. Buy more of those things that help the environment (c.f.: water saving faucets)
7. Think about non-environmental reasons for reducing consumption

I want to bring up the presidential race, and how on Thursday for Earth Day, the candidates brought up their environmental records. Now, before anyone gets too passionate about the things said on Thursday, I want you to think about your own environmental record. What would you tell people about the way you care for God's creation? What have you done? And, more importantly, what can you do?

Paul Cox, a botanist and LDS (Mormon) church member, reminds us of our obligation to environmental protection, restoration, and the struggle for the integrity of creation by commenting, "When Jesus comes again and he asks, 'Where are the desert tortoises that I left on the northern edge of the Mojoave Desert' we may not be so quick to say, 'Well, we needed an extra 18 holes of golf.'"

I want to leave you with a few lyrics from one of the most outspoken people on environmental issues, and one of my favorite singers, John Denver:

"Celebrate Earth Day, every day. Celebrate land and sea, celebrate you and me. Celebrate Earth Day, every day."

Please join me in the struggle for the integrity of creation and in restoring the 'Kingdom of Heaven on Earth'. Amen.