

Green or \$\$\$\$

Psalm 65:5-13,

You answer us with awesome deeds of righteousness, O God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas, <sup>6</sup> who formed the mountains by your power, having armed yourself with strength, who stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations. <sup>8</sup> Those living far away fear your wonders; where morning dawns and evening fades you call forth songs of joy. <sup>9</sup> You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it. <sup>10</sup> You drench its furrows and level its ridges; you soften it with showers and bless its crops. <sup>11</sup> You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance. <sup>12</sup> The grasslands of the desert overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness. <sup>13</sup> The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain; they shout for joy and sing.

Jer. 4:22-26

“My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good.”

<sup>23</sup> I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty; and at the heavens, and their light was gone. <sup>24</sup> I looked at the mountains, and they were quaking; all the hills were swaying. <sup>25</sup> I looked, and there were no people; every bird in the sky had flown away. <sup>26</sup> I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert; all its towns lay in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger.

Genesis 1:26-29

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, <sup>[b]</sup> and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

<sup>29</sup> Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. <sup>30</sup> And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

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When we think about the environment, the first thing that comes to mind is the great outdoors. But today, I would like to ask you to pause and to take a look around you and think about where all of those things you see came from. The wood for this chancel furniture and the pews that you are sitting on came from the forest. ---Someone at some point, years and years ago, went and cut down a tree and turned it into lumber and made that bench, so that you would have somewhere to sit today. And what about the clothes that you are wearing right now? They are probably cotton or linen which come from plants, or wool or silk from animals or made from polyester fibers from petroleum from the earth. --Even the metal zippers and the shell or plastic buttons, and your jewelry come from being mined out of the earth. And think for a second about all of the food that you have already eaten today? It was either grown in the earth or else it was meat that grew up on the face of this earth before you consumed it for breakfast. ---When you really stop and think about it, pretty much **EVERYTHING** that we own, all of the things that make up our modern lives of our homes, our cars, our toys; **all of it** –every last resource that we so mindlessly use and throw away comes to us from the earth and the sea. The air that we breathe, the water that we drink, the food that we eat; and everything that we need for life comes from planet earth. We don't often

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stop and think about it, but this planet and the way that we treat our environment is a pretty fundamental part of our being a human. And because we are to live our lives for Christ, the way that we think about and use the resources of this planet should somehow reflect our life of faith and our commitment to Christ.

It is no secret that Christians have lots of different views on how to treat our planet. There is an entire spectrum of Christian beliefs about the environment. On the one end of the spectrum, there are good Christians who believe that our dominion over the earth simply involves enjoying it and using it up. And then on the other side of the spectrum, we have other good Christians who believe that our caretaking of the environment is a way to create the kingdom of God. There are other perspectives of course, and Christians with multiple viewpoints or even Christians who have never thought about our use of our planet at all!

Today, I would like to suggest that no matter where you are at in your perspective on the environment, there are at least three principles which are useful for Christians of all points of view in order to live on this earth in such a way which strengthens our walk with Christ.

The first principle is one which was probably taught to you right at

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your house by your own parents. It is the **principle of sustainability vs.**

**wastefulness.** I think it is true of children everywhere, but they need to be taught to not be wasteful of the resources that they have. For example, how many of you have reminded a child to turn off the lights in a room they are not using, or to not fill up their plates with food that they won't eat? -- The sustainability of a household budget depends on the family not being wasteful with the finances and the resources that they have. Everything from food to electricity to clothes to household furnishings are things that we train our children to care about and to not to simply tear up and to throw away. --And it is the exact same way with our planet. While we **do** need to take from the earth what we need to survive, it simply is good stewardship to live and care for the earth in such a way that the garden will produce again next year, and that the fish in the pond will be healthy next week.

Because it is father's day, it is appropriate that I share some of the lessons that my Dad taught me about not being wasteful with our natural resources. Nothing would get my Dad angrier than the people who would want to go hunting or fishing in the woods in the back of our farm, but who would not want to take and eat what they killed. Dad would come into the house angry and swearing when he would find deer or fish carcasses left behind in the woods from his coworkers who couldn't be bothered with

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them. --My father knew what it was like to be hungry, and he also knew plenty of people who could use that meat or fish. --To leave those resources outside to spoil in the sun was wasteful and it was selfish. And when I wanted to pick wildflowers, my Father gave me sustainable guidelines to follow. I was to make sure that there were at least three plants of that same type growing in an area before I picked any of them, and then I was to not take all of the flowers from a single plant which would harm it too much. I was instructed to take only one bloom from each plant so that all of the plants could still survive and grow and spread their seeds naturally. My father's lessons about the deer, the fish and the flowers are illustrations about how we as Christians can sustain and grow what is there, and take and use only what you need.

The second principle which is useful for Christians of all perspectives is the principle of striving for care for the creatures on this planet in a **humane rather than a harmful way**. On our small farm, we raised our own cattle in big pastures, and they needed fresh water to drink every day. One of my jobs was to keep those watering troughs full. And with a dozen head of cattle and 90+ degree summer heat doing it was often a challenge. --If I would forget to water the cows, they would stand by their empty water trough and bellow. After I got into trouble, I would have to immediately

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have to drag the hose out to fill the trough. --The guilt that I felt as those thirsty cows would push and shove each other and suck up the water as fast it would come out of the hose made me feel terrible. My punishment was to stand there by the trough with the hose until all of the cows had their fill of water, and then I would need to fill their trough up until it was overflowing. The thirsty anguish of those cows was the lesson that I needed to experience and I have still never forgotten it.

In the United States over the last 50 years, agribusiness has changed the ways that cattle are raised and brought to market. No longer are most cows allowed to run around and to feed off grass in pastures. Now the majority of the meat that you can buy in grocery stores comes instead from animal factories where cattle are fattened only with grain and not grass, and are regularly dosed with antibiotics in order to make sure that cattle survive their cramped and unsanitary feed lot living quarters. By not treating our beef cattle in a humane way, the beef that we buy from these factories is lacking in nutrients and by ingesting so many antibiotics we are actually hurting our own human health. The food that we eat and put on the plates of our friends and children ought not to harm them, but should allow them to grow to become healthy servants of Christ.

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The final principle that all Christians should remember in caring for the environment is that we are to love other people as well as ourselves. And this means that we are called to care about other people's health and the conditions of their environment.

Last month, the New York Times magazine ran a story about Treece, Kansas<sup>i</sup>, located just west of Joplin, Missouri. When WWI began in 1914, there was a call for more lead and zinc and iron ore. The Tri-State Mining area, where Kansas, Oklahoma and Missouri meet was full of the resources to meet that need. Mining operations boomed, and thousands of people flooded into Treece, Kansas, and its neighboring town Picher, to work in the mines. The work in the mines was hard and dangerous, but by 1920, the Treece/Picher mines were the #1 producers of lead and zinc in the United States.

In 1940, the Tri-State Mining area became the site of an investigation by Frances Perkins, the first female Secretary of Labor of the United States. She documented the squalid shacks in which the miners were forced to live because of their low wages. And she held an investigative conference to draw attention to the huge number of miners and their wives and children who were sick and dying with "Miner's Lung" and Tuberculosis. She called for a hospital in the community and for more

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research and safety equipment for the dust which seemed to be the source of the problems.

--But even though the plight of the Tri-State miners was noted by the government, there was no political will to force the mining companies to treat their employees better. And when the United States officially joined WWII, in 1941, the Tri-State mines were needed to be at their full production of lead, zinc and iron to supply the war effort. At their peak levels, over \$20 Billion dollars a year of product was shipped out of the Tri State Mining area, but the conditions for the miners was not much improved.

By the 1970's the last area mine closed. The need for lead and zinc had greatly diminished and the iron ore had mostly been mined out. The area around Treese and Picher was left dotted with huge 200 foot high mountains of dusty gravel mine tailings, called chat. What the residents, mostly children and grandchildren of miners didn't know was that the dust of these piles contained toxic amounts of lead and zinc. The wind had distributed the toxic dust and had contaminated the entire area. When the EPA finally evaluated the area in 1981, they found that the blood lead levels of the Treese and Picher children were three times higher than the national average. --And without the mines pumps working to keep the mine



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shafts clear of water, the groundwater in the area filled up the mine shafts, picked up residual lead and zinc and then flowed back out into the local creeks and streams. Tar Creek, the main local waterway, turned orange with the contaminants and it smelled like vinegar. With sinkholes occurring more often as old mining tunnel supports began to fail under the town, in the 1980's Picher was declared to be part of the Tar Creek Superfund Site, and the remaining Picher residents were bought out of their homes by the government in 2006. The residents of Treece, Kansas had to fight for the same rights and finally were offered their buy out in 2010. With all of the people except for one stubborn couple now gone, the officials in Kansas decided to investigate turning Treece and the surrounding mining area into a wildlife preserve. But the Kansas Department of Wildlife refused. In its current state, the desolated land around Treece is inadequate to even support healthy wildlife. The 40 square mile area around Picher and Treece is now listed as one of the few officially uninhabitable areas of the world, alongside the likes of the site of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Ukraine and the 2011 Fukushima nuclear plant Tsunami disaster site in Japan. Because the mining companies that produced these environmental hazards in the Tri-State Mining District had broken no laws and have long since been unincorporated, the responsibility for cleaning up the mess now

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falls to the state and federal governments. It is unknown whether superfund site cleanups will be funded in future federal budgets.

In conclusion, while Christians can disagree over how to care for the environment and how to balance the needs of humans with the sustainability of nature, there are three principles which can help to guide us in our efforts. If we, as God's children, can strive not waste the wonderful resources that we have been given on this planet, but to use them in a sustainable way, we will have enough not only for today, but also tomorrow. Secondly, if we care for the creatures on our planet in a humane and not a harmful way, we will ensure that our own food supply will not be contaminated and we will be able to serve God more faithfully. And finally, if we love and care for our neighbor as we care for ourselves, we will seek to care for the health and the well being of our neighbors and the environments in which they live. May we have the strength and courage to do so. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> What remains of Treece,

Kansas [http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2012/05/20/magazine/20treece\\_ss-12.html](http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2012/05/20/magazine/20treece_ss-12.html)

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