



On Thursday we celebrated the fifty-first earth day. And after 51 years of global awareness, the science is becoming clearer and clearer that, as predicted, the climate change crisis is escalating. If we keep doing what we've always done, we'll keep getting what we always got - and worse! Climate change may not seem as critically urgent to us as are the many other threats we come face to face with, but we all know that climate change is entirely reshaping the way we live, the decisions we make, the way we share and care for land, the economy, housing and food supply.

Whenever Christians face crisis, we turn to scripture for guidance, for wisdom and especially for hope. So, exactly what does the Bible have to say about climate change? Quite a bit actually, from Genesis to Revelation, God demonstrates enormous affection for all creation and instructs us to participate in that care.

So today, on this Climate Sunday, I thought it good to get an aerial view of what God teaches us about the planet we share. These scriptures I have selected are not even close to an exhaustive survey of all that God says about the relationship between God, humanity and the eco system, but it will give us a foundation on which to build. So, buckle up, put your tray tables upright and in the locked position. We are going for a ride. And like all flight pre-checks, before we take off, let us pray...

*Wondrous power of love, you author all creation and sustain all life, but hide yourself in the immensity and the minutia of the universe. By your Spirit, help us to trust in your creative and healing presence, and to discern those habits and actions that contribute to the true well-being of all creatures. AMEN*

We begin of course at the beginning; the Genesis creation stories. In the first chapters of the first book in our Bible, we get an enormously wide-angle view of the most epic event imaginable...creation itself...

#### **Genesis 1:1-5**

**In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God**

**saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.**

After that, God separated the waters, then formed the dry land and domed the sky, and hurled the stars into the night. God created vegetation, plants and seeds, fruit trees, and forests. And then, God brought forth swarms of living creatures from the waters and birds in the sky and every living creature that moves; cattle and creeping things and wild animals of every kind, and God called it ALL...Good. It was then that God formed the human. From the rich, humus of this unspoiled, good earth, God fashioned the first human and breathed life into his nostrils...

- **Genesis 1:26-31**

**Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."**

**So God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.**

**God blessed them, and God said to them, "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." God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.**

**(Genesis 2:15) The Lord God took the humans and put them in in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.**

These first verses of scripture immediately reveal that, "in the beginning," God intended humanity specifically to preserve, nurture and protect the environment... The earth was delivered to us as an awe-inspiring gift - an inheritance beyond measure. With that came the shared responsibility; we care

for the earth and the earth provides all we need. To “fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion” does NOT mean tame it, pollute it, exploit it or depilate it! From the very beginning, what is clear is that all of humankind’s dignity, purpose and welfare is tightly woven into and bound up in our *care* for the whole of creation.

Well, as you know, It all worked perfectly...for about 20 minutes. It took no time at all before the humans turned away from God. There was betrayal and murder, wars and wickedness that grew like an invasive species across the land. The entire venture was in peril, failing miserably. God was heartbroken by the suffering that evil created. It was too much to bear. So, in merciful loving kindness God chose to reset the whole project. This is the story of Noah and the great flood. Today we might think of Noah’s story as horrific and cruel. How could the God we worship do such a thing? Well, it’s important to know that terrifying “great flood” stories abounded in every culture at that time. These were never meant to be taken literally but as metaphorical lessons. The lesson in Noah’s story is distinctive from others. Here we learn about the wildness and power of a God who abhors violence and evil. So, after 40 days of raging chaos and great fear, the arc endures the storm, eventually dry land reappears, and the earth is reset to begin again. It was a new day and God sealed that day with a sacred vow. The first covenant was made between God, human beings and every living thing. From that moment on, the story moved in a new direction. God would never again destroy the planet. God’s faithfulness to all creation would never waver. This is what God said to them...

- **Genesis 9:7-11**

**Be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it.”**  
**Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”** God said, **“This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.**

To this day every time we are amazed by the awesome beauty of a rainbow, we remember God's promise, and to be amazed by nature is to get a glimpse of God.

Rabbi Abraham Heschel wrote, "Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement. .... get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed."

What is inescapable in all this is that nature itself was the first scripture. Before the Bible was written down, God's power, goodness and infinite beauty was revealed exclusively through the natural world. And of course, this remains true today. The vastness and intricate complexity of nature continues to reflect the nature of our God! As Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, "God's eternal power and divinity have been made known through his works since the creation of the world." (Romans 1:20).

The psalms proclaim the wonder of creation. Many psalms are elated, over-the-top expressions of awe and amazement. This poetry lyrically articulates the great delight God has for the world and the extreme care that is given to all creation...

- **Psalm 24:1-2**

**The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,  
the world, and those who live in it;  
for God has founded it on the seas,  
and established it on the rivers.**

- **Psalm 104:10-15**

**You make springs gush forth in the valleys;  
they flow between the hills,  
giving drink to every wild animal;  
the wild donkeys quench their thirst.  
By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;  
they sing among the branches.  
From your lofty abode you water the mountains;  
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.  
You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,  
and plants for people to use,  
to bring forth food from the earth,  
and wine to gladden the human heart,**

**oil to make the face shine,  
and bread to strengthen the human heart.**

- **Psalm 148:1 &3-6**  
**Praise the Lord!**  
**Praise the Lord from the heavens;**  
**...Praise him, sun and moon;**  
**praise him, all you shining stars!**  
**Praise him, you highest heavens,**  
**and you waters above the heavens!**  
**Let them praise the name of the Lord,**  
**for he commanded and they were created.**  
**He established them forever and ever;**  
**he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.**

However, once again, the history of the world discloses a very different image. Once again, we read of a morally decaying situation. Humanities attitude and behavior towards creation and one another rejects God's original blessing for us to be co-operators in the divine plan. Somehow, we seem to perpetually upend and undercut the world's delicately balanced ecosystems. Humans have an insatiable need to manipulate and control the planet's limited resources, and our greed for limitless profit in markets. This ravenous appetite alienates us from the original purpose of creation. We no longer respect nature as a shared gift; instead, we regard it as a private possession. The outcome of this arrogant worldview is tragic and ongoing. Listen to the prophet Isaiah frame the inevitable consequences.

- **Isaiah 24:3-6**  
**The earth is destroyed**  
**The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled;**  
**for the Lord has spoken this word.**  
**The earth dries up and withers,**  
**the world languishes and withers;**  
**the heavens languish together with the earth.**  
**The earth lies polluted**  
**under its inhabitants;**  
**for they have transgressed laws,**  
**violated the statutes,**  
**broken the everlasting covenant.**  
**Therefore a curse devours the earth,**  
**and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt;**

**therefore the inhabitants of the earth dwindled,  
and few people are left.**

As nature deteriorates, so does the human condition, and this deterioration of our planet weighs most heavily upon the most vulnerable. The impact of climate change affects, primarily people who live in poverty all over this world. If we say we respect all people and all living creatures, it is everyone's responsibility to reverse the direction we are going. We need to repent. We need to make changes in the way we live. The urgent call and challenge today is for all of humanity to work toward sustainable, affordable and earth-friendly development. As all creation thrives, so does humankind.

Jesus loudly echoes God's love for creation. He frequently uses the natural world, to illustrate the goodness and loving attention that God gives to all creation. Jesus insists that every creature, and even the wildflowers and the smallest sparrows, are under God's active, loving care (Matt 6:25-29; Luke 12:6).

The apostle Paul picks up on these themes as well. In First Corinthians he writes, "The Earth is the Lord's and everything in it." (10:26) Listen to what he writes to the Romans. It's not hard to imagine he is writing to us today...

- **Romans 8:18, 22-24**

**I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God... We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?**

In times like these, our hope is critically important. We must cling to these scriptures to make meaning of this crazy, world. In the letter to the Ephesians, we can find hope in this truth...

- **Ephesians 1:7-10**

**In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight, he has made known**

**to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.**

In the “fullness of time, God will to gather up all things.” You see, the earth will never be defeated! ***We will*** suffer the consequences of our abuse of the environment, but never-the-less, God’s Creation, this planet **will** stand.

Near the end of the Book of Revelation, we get an astounding insight into what it looks like when God “gathers up all things.” The prophet poetically describes a “new heaven and new earth” - you will notice that the revelation is not about going to a NEW place. The vision depicts heaven descending down to earth, with the *earth* transformed, unspoiled, and restored. In the end, we return to the beginning, and it is, once again very good.

- **Revelation 21:1-5**

**Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.”**

Did you notice that the “new Jerusalem” doesn’t mean leaving the old one behind? From Genesis to Revelation, we who trust in these sacred texts, can clearly understand that God made all things and profoundly loves the earth. What’s more, we were made to protect it, to nurture it, to serve it, and ultimately, by God’s grace, the earth and all things in it will be renewed.

What do you think? Do you believe that God is working--right now--to bring this world to its fulfillment? When you walk in the woods or stroll through a park, climb a mountain or tend your garden, do you believe that God is actively perfecting all you see?

If not, that's fine. You're certainly not alone. We **can** continue to live as we have always lived - return to the way we lived in the pre-pandemic world.

But for those of us who do believe that a new world is coming to pass, then we have our work in front of us. Our hope needs to be put in motion. It's time to start practicing living as if we have already been made new, as if God is really quite fond of you and it's your delight to please God. Let us start now - today. Let us take up the sacred invitation to co-operate this new world. Let us love one another, love our neighbor and love all creation.

To that end, the Climate Action Team has put together a variety of actionable suggestions on ways we can care for the earth. The downloadable document is on our website and will also be in the May newsletter. To engage in any or all of these ideas can be a spiritual practice, a tangible offering to God, a prayer in motion. Beginning next week, Natalie and I are grateful and blessed to be going to the woods for 3 months. We will be working to build a simple home that is climate friendly, sustainable and affordable. We will be steeped in the goodness of God and connected to the outdoors. You too can share in that blessing this summer by picking some or all of these suggestions. No one can do everything, but everyone can do something. Pick just one and imagine that God is-right now-bringing about the holy city and you have a part in it.

When we return, I hope we can share our stories about how we experienced God's delight in our work to help renew the earth. As a symbol of our shared journey, I have two lovely young ARBORVITAE trees. One will be planted at TriCon near the fountain on the front lawn and we will plant ours on Chebeague Island. Together, let us grow like these trees to make the world a better, cleaner, more sustainable world. And we pray...

"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." AMEN!