

April 24, 2016
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon - "Keep It In The Ground"

Friday, April 22 was officially Earth Day.

I remember the first Earth Day in 1970.

I was twelve years old and someone in our town organized a 20-mile walk to draw attention to the problems of pollution.

It was the first time I recall hearing the word environment.

I remember that my sister and I were deeply concerned with the concept of ruining the planet.

My mother was skeptical that we could walk 20 miles but we were adamant that we must – to save the earth!

Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin started Earth Day in response to seeing the damage caused by a 1969 oil spill in Santa Barbara, California.

News reports from the day indicate that 20 million people throughout the country took part in Earth Day activities ranging from protests, teach-ins and community gatherings.

Twenty years later, in 1990 Earth Day went global with 200 million people in 141 countries participating in events designed to highlight the destruction of our planet – God's planet.

Today, environmentalism – worrying about the condition of our planet, has been politicized.

Almost half of the adults in the United States think that the dangers of climate change have been exaggerated.

Money for environmental clean up or development of alternate energy sources gets tied to political parties rather than humanitarian values.

Our readings this morning remind us that the earth was created by God.

God was pleased with what was created and called it 'good.' Dominion over the earth and the earth's creatures was granted to humans – a privilege that we might want to pay closer attention to.

The Earth is such an incredible example of God's abundant love for us; of God's creativity; of God's plan for interconnectedness of all beings.

Scriptural references to creation abound.

The psalms tell of the beauty of the earth and all that is a part of it.

God – when speaking to Job –asks

‘Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell me, if you have understanding.

Who determined its measurements—surely you know!

Or who stretched the line upon it?

On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?...

Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars, and spreads its wings toward the south?

Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up and makes its nest on high?”

The earth, my friends, is a gift from God.

A gift so magnificent and so miraculous that we can only look at it in awe and humility.

Who are we to think that we can manipulate the earth;

use up the resources;

damage the soil, the air, the water?

What kind of creatures take a gift and use it for the destruction of their fellow species?

The United Church of Christ is participating in a campaign called ‘Keep it in the Ground.’

The premise of this movement is to keep fossil fuels in the ground – where God put them.

Environmental activist Bill McGibbon explains “We have to keep 80 percent of the fossil-fuel reserves that we know about underground. If we don’t—if we dig up the coal and oil and gas and burn them—we will overwhelm the planet’s physical systems, heating the Earth far past the red lines drawn by scientists and governments. It’s not “we should do this,” or “we’d be wise to do this.” Instead it’s simpler: “We have to do this.”

Diane Butler Bass writing from a theological point of view says “The winds of worry are howling. Yet if one listens carefully, there is evident the whisper of God. Change is in the air.”

I chose to read the entire first chapter of Genesis this morning to remind us that God created the world and gave it to us to live in.

Our world and everything in it belongs to God.

Everything you have, everything you created is a direct result of the gifts God has given you.

Light and stars, water and sky, fruit and vegetable, birds and animals – you – everything created by God.

Could you have accomplished anything in your life without light? Without air?

My friends, we are tenants on God's earth and we have a responsibility to tend to this planet with love, with tenderness, with devotion.

When our children go to Silver Lake each summer they are taught this lesson in countless ways.

They learn how to be mindful of what they are eating – and throwing away.

They learn about gardening and composting.

They learn to not waste water.

They learn about sharing and being interconnected to one another.

Next month, on May 21 we are hosting a retreat at Silver Lake that will focus on creating this same type of mindfulness in adults.

We will spend half a day together examining how our lives can have meaning and impact.

I hope you will join us.

Jesus said, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

To me that means that God, through Jesus Christ, gave us everything and we are to show our gratitude and love by caring for all that we have been given.

We are called to tend to the earth; care for the birds and animals and to love, with compassion and understanding, all of our brothers and sisters throughout the world.

This, for me, is what the kingdom of heaven looks like.