

Genesis 1:27-31, (Focus: Genesis 2:15)

We've been hearing a lot about the war in the Ukraine. It's terrible, with so many people dying, and so many people who have lost everything. Recently, I read an article that talked about the long-term consequences of the war. It may take decades to clean up the environmental damage. Factories that are bombed can release harmful chemicals into the air, and bombs themselves can have harmful effects on the air, land, and water.

Today, I'd like to reflect on how God created life and the environment where we live, according to Genesis. How are we working at taking care of the environment? People have different perspectives on this. Some just feel overwhelmed and so do nothing. Others commit their lives to working to improve the environment. Some Christians believe that our environment has nothing to do with our faith.

The Bible does have something to say about caring for our environment, though. In verse 28 of Genesis 1, God says, "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." This means we are to be like caretakers for the animals. It doesn't mean we are to recklessly just use up the earth for our own pleasure. In verse 30, we see God's care for all of life. "And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, and to everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." God cares for all living creatures. We read that "God saw everything he had made, and indeed it was very good."

In chapter 2, there is a second version of the Creation story. Here, God creates Adam from the dust of the earth, breathing life into him. The name Adam actually comes from the Hebrew word "Adamah," which means "earth." This name illustrates how we are very much connected with the earth on which we live. We came from dust, and after we die, we return to dust – yet God gives us dignity by creating us in God's image. Verse 15 says that God put the man in the garden of Eden "to till it and keep it." I guess that must be the first occupation in the world. Adam and Eve were gardeners – taking care of God's good gift of Creation.

Here and there, throughout the Bible we see God's care for the earth. In the story of Jonah, the prophet hopes that God will destroy the Ninevites because of their wickedness, but God has mercy on them. God says, "should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?" (Jonah chapter 4, verse 11) It's an interesting ending. People are often ignorant, but God still cares. And, God also cares for animals! Another example of God's care for the earth is seen in Jesus. In Matthew chapter six, he encourages us to seek first God's Kingdom rather than worrying. He gives the example of how God cares and provides for birds, and flowers, even though their life is short. Jesus emphasises that God certainly cares for us as well.

We live with hope, but not in something that may or may not happen. Our hope is in something that has already happened. Jesus has triumphed over sin and evil through his death on the cross and the resurrection. Our hope is in Jesus Christ the one who has been at work all along, the one who gives us the power to take steps to do our part.

A group of people were having a discussion about the future of the earth and the question of how we should take care of it. One man grew frustrated, shrugged his shoulders, and said, "Well, it's all going to burn up anyway" (in the final judgement). Another man offered to buy him a pack of cigarettes so he could smoke them all right away. He explained, "If everything is ultimately going to be destroyed—even you and your body—and according to you, that negates our responsibility in the meantime, then it doesn't matter if you have a good smoke..." Even though we'll die someday, we still need to care for our bodies. In a similar way, whether we believe the world will be burned up, or if we believe the fire is a symbol of purification rather than a literal destruction of the earth, it doesn't change our responsibility to care for the earth.

I've been surprised to see the effects of human pollution and climate change caused by it. As a teenager, I once enjoyed hiking with my family and walking on the Yoho glacier in one of BC's national parks. Years later, I was on my honeymoon, hiking in the same area with Rie. I wanted to show her the glacier. After maybe a couple of hours, we got to the spot and to my surprise, that part of the glacier was completely gone! All that was left was a giant hole. I was in awe that something that big could have melted within my lifetime

We know that much of what we buy is produced in countries that have problems with pollution. We can try to live simply rather than buying too much stuff, knowing that much of what we buy is connected with pollution and waste. What else might we be able to do? We need to be ready to take one step, as we sense God leading. We don't have to make huge changes all at once. If we're faithful in one step, God will continue to show us the next steps.

Jesus taught us about God's love, and how we are to love one another. 1<sup>st</sup> John 3, starting in verse 16 says, "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action." By caring for the environment, we are showing care for those who are affected by the problems due to environmental problems.

As people around the world experience disasters related to climate change, tensions mount. How can we improve the earth rather than fill it with more garbage, polluting the land, air, and water? What is the church doing? What are we doing? We need an answer that fits with our faith and what is happening on our planet. How does the world see the church? Some people have given up on the church, thinking that it is irrelevant, that Christianity has nothing to do with real life because many Christians seem to be doing very little to care for the environment. But, there are stories of Christians who have made a positive difference.

Each summer, BC has been experiencing the effects of climate change with more and more forest fires. And, the flooding that happened last year is just one more example. I was happy to hear that Darnell and Christina Barkman, leaders at Yarrow Mennonite church, along with other church and community leaders helped organize groups to do sandbagging, feeding and hosting people who needed help, and cleaning up.

It's good to see that churches played an important role in helping people work together as they faced the disaster. Mennonite Church British Columbia now has a "Creation Care Task Group" that helps congregations think of ways they can be faithful to God's call to care for our environment. God calls us to care for our neighbours. But, our care for other people is also connected with our care for the environment. Because we live in a rich country, we are somewhat insulated from the effects of climate change. But, if you look at people in developing countries, they're the ones who are already suffering the most. Increased flooding and drought have been affecting their livelihoods. For us, the problems may feel like they are far away. I know for me, it's easy to forget that people are suffering because of climate change.

We can support organisations like the Mennonite Central Committee. Through MCC churches have been supporting relief efforts around the world. For example, in Honduras, and Guatemala, Central America, MCC has also been working with farmers who are struggling to survive. In 2020 they lost their harvest due to drought. In 2021 they lost their harvest again due to hurricanes. These disasters are not just the usual things that happen to the farmers. Over the years the disasters have been increasing.

By doing our part to improve the environment in which we live, we give care to our neighbours in developing countries. Someday, God may ask us these kinds of questions, "What did you do with the creation I called good and asked you to care for?" And, "What did you do to care for other people?" We're not called to fix everyone's problems, but we are called to follow the leading of the Spirit of

Jesus Christ in taking care of God's good creation, and in sharing God's love with those people of whom God makes us aware. I know I have a lot to learn in order to care more for those in need. May God guide us as we look beyond our own needs in order to take care of what God has given us, and share God's blessings with others. Let's pray.

Loving God, you have blessed us with a comfortable safe country in which to live. We know there are many in the world who struggle to find enough to eat, and there are those who are suffering because of the effects of climate change. We confess that it can feel overwhelming. We pray for the courage to let go of our own fears in order to be faithful in small steps, as you lead. Thank-you for the beauty of this amazing world that you've created. And, on this Mother's Day, we thank-you for our mothers. We give you thanks that you care for us like a loving mother. In Christ we pray, Amen.