
Earth Day, April 22, 2018

Genesis 2:15 The Message (MSG)

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If you were born on April 23, 1970 or later, you are the people in this worship who have not lived one day of your life without the celebration of Earth Day.

Each year, Earth Day—April 22—marks the anniversary of the birth of the **modern environmental movement in 1970**.

The height of counterculture in the United States, 1970 brought the death of Jimi Hendrix, the last Beatles album, and Simon & Garfunkel’s “Bridge Over Troubled Water.” War raged in Vietnam and students nationwide overwhelmingly opposed it.

At the time, Americans were slurping leaded gas through massive V8 sedans. Industry belched out smoke and sludge with little fear of legal consequences or bad press. Air pollution was commonly accepted as the smell of prosperity. “Environment” was a word that appeared more often in spelling bees than on the evening news.

Mainstream America largely remained oblivious to environmental concerns. In 1962, the stage had been set for change by the publication of Rachel Carson’s New York Times bestseller *Silent Spring*. The book represented a watershed moment, and beginning to raise public awareness and concern

- for living organisms,
- the environment
- and links between pollution and public health.

Earth Day 1970 gave voice to that emerging consciousness, channeling the energy of the anti-war protest movement and putting environmental concerns on the front page. The faith community was a player.

God Created the Universe

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. (Genesis 1:1, 31)

The Lord reigns... Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad, let the seas resound and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy, they will sing before the Lord for He comes, He comes to judge the earth. (Psalm 96: 10-13)

How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number—living things both large and small. (Psalm 104:24-25)



God Owns Creation. To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. (Deuteronomy 10:14)

God Sustains Creation In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind. (Job 12:10)

You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly...The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain; they shout for joy and sing. (Psalm 65:9-13)

The idea for a national day to focus on the environment came to Earth Day founder Gaylord Nelson, then a U.S. Senator from Wisconsin, after witnessing the ravages of the 1969 massive oil spill in Santa Barbara, California.

Inspired by the student anti-war movement, he realized that if he could infuse that energy with an emerging public consciousness about air and water pollution, it would force environmental protection onto the national political agenda.

On April 22, 1970, 20 million Americans took to the streets, parks, and auditoriums to demonstrate for a healthy, sustainable environment in massive coast-to-coast rallies.

Thousands of colleges and universities organized protests to address the deterioration of the environment. Groups that had been fighting against oil spills, polluting factories and power plants, raw sewage, toxic dumps, pesticides, freeways, the loss of wilderness, and the extinction of wildlife suddenly realized **they shared common values.**

Earth Day 1970 achieved a rare political alignment, enlisting support from Republicans and Democrats, rich and poor, city slickers and farmers, tycoons and labor leaders. By the end of that year, the first Earth Day had led to the creation of the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the passage of the CLEAN AIR ACT; THE CLEAN WATER ACT and THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT.

“It was a gamble, for this nation to present a united front on controversial and emotional issues” Gaylord recalled, “but it worked.”

We can unite and work together ... members of the faith community – like us at HAGL, can and must continue to work toward the common goodness of God’s creation, by continuing to be responsible for God’s gifts.

As 1990 approached, Earth Day went global, mobilizing 200 million people in 141 countries and lifting environmental issues onto the world stage. Earth Day 1990 gave a huge boost to recycling efforts worldwide.

As the **millennium** approached, this time the focus was on global warming and a push for clean energy. A push we participate in by encouraging the use of electric vehicles.



Earth Day 2000 used the power of the Internet to organize activists, Earth Day 2000 sent world leaders the loud and clear message that citizens around the world wanted quick and decisive action on global warming and clean energy.

Earth Day has reached its status as the largest secular observance in the world, celebrated by more than a billion people every year, and as a day of action that changes human behavior and provokes policy changes.

Christians five centuries ago knew this well. They set aside a few days a year during planting time, **Rogation Days**, to offer their thanksgivings and to ask for the Lord's blessing on their fields and crops.

Readings from that Rogation Day tradition are clear about who is the Creator.

God said to Job from the whirlwind: **“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth . . . when the morning stars sang together, and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?”**

Genesis 1 tells us this answer. God created heaven and earth and said it was good. And, although in the Christian tradition the human role in God's world is unique among the animals, man and woman are not creators, we are merely a part of the Creation — placed in the garden by God. Job learned that lesson the hard way.

Rogation Day readings affirm that God not only created the earth and all that is upon it, but that Creation belongs to God – the land, the water, the animals, the air, the “riches” — all God's. This is emphasized by way of the parable from Luke 12:13-21

Luke 12:13-21 The Message (MSG)

The Story of the Greedy Farmer

13 Someone out of the crowd said, “Teacher, order my brother to give me a fair share of the family inheritance.”

14 He replied, “Mister, what makes you think it's any of my business to be a judge or mediator for you?”

15 Speaking to the people, he went on, “Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed. Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot.”

16-19 Then he told them this story: “The farm of a certain rich man produced a terrific crop. He talked to himself: ‘What can I do? My barn isn't big enough for this harvest.’ Then he said, ‘Here's what I'll do: I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll gather in all my grain and goods, and I'll say to myself, Self, you've done well! You've got it made and can now retire. Take it easy and have the time of your life!’

20 “Just then God showed up and said, ‘Fool! Tonight, you die. And your barnful of goods—who gets it?’



21 *“That’s what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God.*

The rich man who has accumulated so many worldly goods that he must build a bigger barn to contain them all. God’s response is to call the rich man a fool and declare, “This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” We know the answer to that one too.

So, from the Scripture we know that God is the creator and that creation belongs to God.

There is a collect for Rogation that gives us some insight into the role of humanity in the context of Creation. It begins by saying to the Lord, **your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature.** . . . it doesn’t limit the statement to creatures that provide us with food, or those that are commercially valuable. It is unequivocal. It says *every* living creature.

There is a story from the Jewish tradition when Noah is loading the Ark with the Camels and water buffalos and the goats, when up the ramp comes a pair of tiny little gnats. According to the story, Noah turned to God and said, **“You want me to save the gnats? Of what possible value could they be?”** And God replied **“Yes Noah, save the gnats. They hold many secrets you may never know.”**

In fact, it is the Noah story where the bible is quite clear that God’s covenant was established not just with people, but with all of creation. God said to Noah and his sons, **“I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the Earth.”**

Can any of you, who have seen a rainbow, possibly doubt God’s resolve to uphold his covenant with the Earth.

But what about us? I wonder what God thinks of our modern attitudes toward the diversity of life, where value is measured not in terms of the secrets the creatures may hold, but in dollars and cents. We treat the earth like an ark in reverse. Rather than march the animals two by two up the ramp of survival, we march them faster and faster down the gang-plank of extinction. **“They are taking our property rights”** we say, **“just to save the spotted owl or the wild salmon.”** But I think we need to start asking ourselves the question, whose property is it, really? And, on whose authority do we use our private land to the detriment of God’s creation?”**[How are we acting?]**

Which brings us back to the collect for today and our request that God **“grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts...”**

Faithful stewards. . . What does it mean to be a faithful steward of God’s creation? Good question. Fortunately, the bible provides guidance — the first reference right in Genesis 2 when God placed the human creature in the garden **“to till it and keep it.”** Clearly this direction from



God means we have the authority, if not the responsibility, to till the Earth in order to make its productive powers flourish. But does this mean we are to till **all of it?**

I don't think so, because we also have the obligation to **"keep it"** which means to sustain it, conserve it, perpetuate it — to **"keep"** the Earth by protecting its God created life systems and life forms. And, let's not forget the rainbow — God's covenant with creation and with all the world's creatures. "Till it" yes but know when to stop. – and "keep it." Live with it and reap. Restore and recycle.

The point is, God speaks to us through the earth.

Nature is the ultimate tangible manifestation of God in our midst

Like the little gnats in the Noah story, there remain many secrets we may never know — this spiritual journey is still more mystery than understanding. But day by day, one step at a time, with God's help, the understanding grows.

Let us pray

Lord, we thank you for this opportunity to reflect on your creation, your covenant with all living things, and our obligation to be good stewards of the gifts you have provided. Help us to understand that each of us has an important role in Caring for Creation, by the choices we make and by the actions we take. Give us the wisdom to choose thoughtfully, and to act with care, in accordance with your will, and your love of this good Earth, our island home.

Happy Earth Day — Amen



SCRIPTURE VERSES FOR EARTH DAY

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Command to Care for Creation

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (Genesis 2:15)

Creation Praises the Creator

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad, let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord. (Psalm 96:11-13)

Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the heights above. Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts. Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. He set them in place forever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away. (Psalm 148:1-6)

Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds. (Psalm 148:7-10)

