

Earth Day Every Day

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church
June 17, 2018 Pastor Bill Chadwick

Scripture: Portions of Psalm 104 (adapted from *The Message*)

*All: O my soul, bless God! God, my God, how great you are!
Dressed up in sunshine, and all heaven stretched out for your tent.
You blanketed earth with ocean, covered the mountains with deep waters;
Then you roared and the water ran away—your thunder crash put it to flight.*

Recited by January – June Birthdays:

*Mountains pushed up, valleys spread out in the places you assigned them.
You started the springs and rivers, sent them flowing among the hills.
All the wild animals now drink their fill, wild donkeys quench their thirst.
Along the riverbanks the birds build nests, ravens make their voices heard.
You water the mountains from your heavenly cisterns; earth is supplied with plenty of water.
You make grass grow for the livestock, hay for the animals that plow the ground.*

Recited by July – December Birthdays:

*GOD's trees are well-watered—the Lebanon cedars She planted.
Birds build their nests in those trees; look—the stork at home in the treetop.
Mountain goats climb about the cliffs; badgers burrow among the rocks.
The moon keeps track of the seasons, the sun is in charge of each day.
When it's dark and night takes over, all the forest creatures come out.
The young lions roar for their prey, clamoring to God for their supper.
When the sun comes up, they vanish, lazily stretched out in their dens.
Meanwhile, men and women go out to work, busy at their jobs until evening.*

All: What a wildly wonderful world, GOD!

*You made it all, with Wisdom at your side,
made earth overflow with your wonderful creations.
Oh, look—the deep, wide sea, brimming with fish past counting,
sardines and sharks and salmon.
O my soul, bless GOD!*

Some of you will remember Pat Peterson, now Pat Handlson. We were best friends in ninth grade and I invited him to Oak Grove. He became a member, and ultimately was ordained to the ministry in the Presbyterian Church. During his freshman year at Cornell College in Iowa, Pat's roommate was from Hawaii. One spring day his roommate returned to their room and said, "Pat! Have you seen the beautiful yellow flowers the college planted all over campus?" Puzzled, Pat said, "No, I didn't" and then he strode over to the window and looked out for a few moments.

"Oh," said Pat. "Yeah, the college didn't plant those. Those are called dandelions. They're weeds. You don't have dandelions in Hawaii?"

"Weeds!?" exclaimed his roommate. "They're beautiful!"

Weeds are beautiful?

Lawns.

Listen to this imagined conversation between St. Francis, played by Ty Hudson, and God, played by Mary Koon.

God: St. Francis, you know all about gardens and nature. What in the world is going on down there? What happened to the dandelions, violets, thistle and stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect, no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honeybees and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of color by now. But all I see are these green rectangles.

St. Francis: It's the tribes that settled there. The Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers "weeds" and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.

God: Grass? But it's so boring. It's not colorful. It doesn't attract butterflies, birds and bees, only grubs and sod worms. It's temperamental with temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want all that grass growing there?

St. Francis: Apparently so, Your Holiness. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green. They begin each spring by fertilizing grass and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn.

God: The spring rains and warm weather probably make grass grow really fast. That must make them very happy.

St. Francis: Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it grows a little, they cut it, sometimes twice a week.

God: They cut it? Do they then bale it like hay?

St. Francis: Not exactly. Most of them rake it up and put it into bags.

God: They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?

St. Francis: No, Ma'am – just the opposite. They pay to throw it away.

God: Now, let me get this straight. They fertilize grass so it will grow. And when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?

St. Francis: Yes.

God: These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.

St. Francis: You aren't going to believe this, Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.

God: What nonsense. At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so Myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the autumn they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. Plus, as they rot, the leaves form compost to enhance the soil. It's a natural circle of life.

St. Francis: You'd better sit down. The Suburbanites have drawn a new circle. As soon as the leaves fall, they rake them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away.

God: No! What do they do to protect the shrub and tree roots in the winter and to keep the soil moist and loose?

St. Francis: After throwing away the leaves, they go out and buy something which they call mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves.

God: And where do they get this mulch?

St. Francis: They cut down trees and grind them up to make the mulch.

God: Oh, my Me!

We're silly, aren't we? Thank you, thespians.

As is the case with many of the world's ills, at the heart of the matter is bad theology. During the Industrial Revolution people read those words from Genesis in which God gives over the world to man's (and I use the word intentionally here, not inclusively)...over to man's "dominion" and chose to interpret that to mean the people could do whatever they wanted to the earth and the water and the air and the animals.

But that, of course, is not what the Genesis writer intended. The word translated "dominion" means to "have stewardship over," "to care for" that which belongs to someone else. Just as when you borrow someone's car or someone's sweater you plan to take good care of it, knowing it doesn't belong to you.

In mistreating the creation we are clearly violating God's intentions. It's the essence of the definition of sin: we forget who is the Creator and who is merely a part of the creation. We act as if *we* are God.

But we are not.

Remembering that fact is the key to environmental stewardship. The word "human" is at its root very similar to the word "humus" and the word "humility." Humility is the key to effective stewardship of the Creation. We are a culture that wants a lot of stuff and we need it now and we need it cheap. We don't want to wait for a bus, we need to move fast, on our schedule. We don't want fruit with the slightest imperfection in it and we don't want a weed in our yard...the list goes on. It's a culture of arrogance and immediate gratification. In contrast with the famous tenet of the Iroquois Confederacy, in which decisions are made on the basis of how they will affect one's descendants down to the seventh generation.

Again, humility is the key to effective stewardship of the Creation.

I want to talk briefly about lawns. And then about climate change.

Why do we hate dandelions? I love reading evolutionary biology, learning about why we do some of the strange things we do. I read one theory that we humans love manicured lawns because we can look out and see if there are any snakes or other predators out there. Lawns help us feel safe, as opposed to our ancestors who lived in the bush, with lots of hiding places for unpleasant things.

I want us to think together about lawns in three areas. First, poisons, herbicides.

When I bought my first house in Stillwater many years ago I was surrounded by retired people. The men in these houses dedicated themselves to the perfect lawn. I didn't have

time, inclination or money to have a perfect lawn. I consoled myself by the thought that the state of one's lawn can tell you what you really worship. God? Or grass?

When Kris and I moved to Minnetonka in 1995 our neighbor was newly retired. He spent twenty hours or more each week working in his yard. His sweet dog, Barkley, was his constant companion in the yard. His yard looked good. He had it professionally sprayed about four times a year. In between times, he would attack individual weeds with his handheld sprayer. Well, Barkley developed cancer, and Joe admitted to me, "It probably was from the chemicals I put on the lawn. I feel terrible." Barkley died. A couple years later Joe developed cancer...and died.

The cancer rate among children in the US is going up almost one percent per year.

Kris and I no longer spray our lawn for weeds. I bought this really great dandelion digger this year. Aerates at the same time. I know what you're thinking: "The dandelion will just grow back." Maybe. You don't see the chemical companies making that claim any more. If the dandelion does grow back, the second time you dig it up the taproot will not have enough energy left to grow a third time, because the dandelion gets its energy from photosynthesis, which you have stopped.

The late Leon Snyder, the former head of the University of Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, used to say of dandelions and other non-grass plants that grow in our lawns, "They are green, they are nice to walk on. Enjoy them!" You will notice at the Arboretum that they clearly don't spray their dandelions.

If you don't use poisons on your lawn the Green Committee invites you to take a sign and advertise that fact.

I don't know anything about these landscape companies, but I listed a couple in the bulletin who use organic methods to treat your lawn.

And what about watering? How much water do residents put on their lawns in Bloomington per year? Estimated to be 1.1 BILLION gallons. (Bloomington Sustainability Commission.) And when you water you have to mow more often, as St. Francis noted. We don't water at our house until it's getting pretty brown. Some summers we don't water at all. Then we don't have to mow.

According to the EPA, a typical gas-powered lawn mower operated for an hour produces the same amount of noxious emissions as ELEVEN new cars being driven for an hour. My battery-powered mower runs for 30-40 minutes before needing charging, and then

takes just 15 minutes to re-charge. Just long enough for Kris to relax with an iced tea before she gets out there again. That's not a joke. She does most of the mowing.

With our electric mower, I don't have to change the oil or give it a tune-up each year. MUCH cheaper than a gas mower. In the fall, just bring the battery into the basement and fold the mower up against the wall in the garage. And it's QUIET! And it doesn't stink. It's pleasant to mow the lawn. (Just ask Kris.)

We also have had a battery-powered trimmer for years. It's not stinky like the gas ones and it is quieter.

Bottom line: lawns have to go. The monoculture of Kentucky bluegrass, a non-native species in Minnesota, is unsustainable. We need to replace it with fescue, with prairie grasses, and other plants that use less water and maintenance. I am confident that if humans are still around a hundred years from now that they will look with amusement and amazement at how we surrounded our houses with carpets of grass, at tremendous cost in time and money and damage to God's creation.

Okay. Much bigger issue. Climate change. We don't have the option to do nothing. In the bulletin today is an insert on what Oak Grove has done, and what you can do, to counteract climate change. I want to pause here and thank those of you who have been centrally involved in Oak Grove's efforts to reduce our carbon footprint.

Let me make just three brief points about climate change.

First. Jesus famously said, "Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you have done it unto me." Climate change affects the poorest and most oppressed people of the world much more than it does the average person. If you care about the poor, work to combat climate change.

Second. In the US who is the biggest user of petroleum? Hint, it is also the protector of extractors. The US military is the biggest user of petroleum.

Third. Some scientists assert that even more important than cutting one's individual energy use for transportation and housing is to change our diet, specifically to stop eating beef. Cattle, beef and dairy, account for more greenhouse gases than does transportation. Cattle cause, depending on the study, somewhere between 21% and 51% of greenhouse gases. That's right, at least one-fifth, maybe one half, of greenhouse gases are caused by cattle, as they burp methane gas.

Fourth. What is the single biggest thing we can do to stop climate change? It's not plant a tree. It's not even stop eating beef. Once again, it's campaign finance reform. The two

Koch Brothers, who own vast numbers of petroleum businesses, together are worth something more than 100 Billion dollars. In the 2016 elections they headed a coalition of 300 like-minded people to spend about \$300 million to support petroleum-friendly candidates. 300 people spent \$300 million on the election. The planet has no future without campaign finance reform. Al and Carol Frechette have info on a table in the narthex on the Move to Amend program.

Let me finish with some words of hope. The Creation, Mother Nature as we like to anthropomorphize, is incredibly resilient if we give her a chance. Three examples. A few decades ago eagles in this country were nearing extinction. Once DDT was eliminated they came back much faster than anyone predicted. It hardly even registers with me when I see a bald eagle now. They're everywhere.

Second. How many of you remember when the Cuyahoga River in downtown Cleveland caught on fire? The year was 1969? The summer before the first Earth Day. Many contend that the river catching on fire was the event that pushed over the top the adoption of the Clean Water Act and the formation of the Environmental Protection Agency and the establishing of the first Earth Day the next April, 1970. Today more than 40 species of fish swim in the river's waters. Even fish that can only live in clean water, like steelhead trout and northern pike, have returned. Do you remember what Lake Minnetonka was like fifty years ago, when sewage ran straight into the lake? Not pleasant. Today it's one of the cleanest and healthiest lakes around. Loons once again abound on Lake Minnetonka.

Third example. A number of years ago, our then-presbytery executive, Judy Kolwicz, reported at a presbytery meeting on her recent trip to Scotland. This was just shortly after the Mad Cow epidemic went through the United Kingdom. Remember that the livestock were all killed to help prevent the spread of the disease around the world. Judy reported that when Scotland's sheep farms started over with new breeding stock they found that an amazing phenomenon took place. Ewes, the mama sheep, which would normally be expected to have one or two lambs each spring, regularly had two or three instead. The flocks were back up to full size much more quickly than expected.

God's Creation is so full of life, fecundity and fertility, if we just give her a chance.

May we be faithful! Amen?

What Oak Grove Has Done to Curb Climate Change

1. Replaced lights with **LED lights** in building, sanctuary and parking lot. Installed **ultra high efficiency HVAC** to cut our electrical energy usage and carbon emissions by 45%.
2. We pay to have 100% of our electricity come from wind turbines (**WindSource**).
3. Putting on **rooftop solar** and are joining a **community solar garden** in 2018 to get additional electricity from solar. (Will produce 160% more renewable energy electricity than we consume to help offset our natural gas carbon emissions.)
4. Built a **rain garden** to capture 15% of our storm water run-off to curb pollution, recharge groundwater, and promote native plants and pollinators. Planning to build more.
5. Conducted 20 + **adult faith formation classes on climate change** and environmental issues since 2013.
6. Will re-roof with **cooler, more reflective Energy Star shingles** as current roof reaches its age and wear limits.
7. Will **stop using lawn chemicals** and curtail sprinkling of our lawn. Will replace turf grass with native, pollinator-friendly plants and grasses where possible.
8. Helped organize the **Bloomington Sustainability Commission** which drafted a plan approved by City Council to attain a goal of 75% reduction of carbon emissions in Bloomington by 2035.
9. We are recognized as a **Presbyterian Earth Care Congregation** and serve as a role model for churches in our Presbytery, community and nation.

What Members Can Do to Curb Climate Change

1. **Be politically active** to support policies and candidates addressing the issues of climate change and oppose passing the impacts of catastrophic climate change onto the backs of the poor. **Vote. Encourage everyone else to vote. Support meaningful campaign finance reform.**
2. **Eat less meat, especially beef, and reduce consumption of dairy.** According to one study, beef requires 28 times more land to produce than pork or chicken, 11 times more water and results in five times more climate-warming emissions. The livestock industry produces approximately one fifth or more of worldwide greenhouse gas emissions, more than transportation.
3. Get an **energy audit** and act on its recommendations.
4. Replace all your incandescent and CFL lights with **LEDs now**. Buy **Energy Star appliances** when replacing.
5. Join **WindSource to get 100%** of your electricity from wind.
6. **Limit** family size.
7. Investigate joining a **community solar garden**, putting on **rooftop solar**, and/or **solar water heating**.
8. **Drive less. Walk, bike, take mass transit, and carpool more.**
9. **Make your next car** an EV (Electric Vehicle), PHEV (Plug-in Hybrid), Hybrid, or fuel economy ICE (Internal Combustion Engine).
10. **Recycle everything**, including composting organics along with the mulching of leaves and lawn clippings. Bloomington organics recycling is now at Bush Lake and Valley View Park.
11. **Use reusable bags** for shopping and **buy locally grown food**.
12. **Offset your carbon footprint** (e.g. airplane travel) by buying carbon offset credits. Help bring renewable energy to the poor, worldwide.