

The New Century Hymnal was made in 1995, anticipating this new century, the 21st century; The New Century Hymnal was put together 30 years ago! And the song we just sang (“God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale”) was written about 40 years ago! ... the amazing Creation and Creator God ... and How is it that we serve this God? I remind us that the book of Job concludes with God challenging Job to consider nature and creation (“Where were you when I made the whale, Do you know how to give the lions or the birds their food?”) God challenges Job to accept his place as one of the creatures, his place of humility before the amazing things of Creation. Jesus also asks us to ponder carefully the amazing things in nature: “Consider the Lilies of the field... Consider the birds of the air.”

The transformation for Job was to give up questioning God, saying “Why Why Why?” Humility before the Creator, is admitting that we will never get answers to all our questions, especially about why there are storms or illnesses or death. So Job came to a new acceptance of nature, even his illnesses, by being in the midst of a “whirlwind.” (Sounds like a tornado to me.) (The Bible says that a “great wind” caused his house to collapse, killing his children.)

I think that the attitude of awe and wonder about Creation is naturally followed by “What are we to do as good stewards of this earth that we have been given?” What can we do to care for the Earth? This song, God of the sparrow, the whale, the earthquake, the storm... has timeless relevance. I visited Woods Hole on Cape Cod and came back with a T-shirt that has a picture of a whale, a North Atlantic “Right Whale.” The back of the T-shirt says “Extinction is *forever*.” (Remember the sermon Bill Lincoln gave using all his mission T-shirts! Here’s the Woods Hole T-shirt!) I have not researched a comprehensive list of Species going extinct, but

we know there are many. I'm amazed at how often documentaries about Coral Reefs are shown on TV. It's documented that sea temperatures are rising in many areas. The reefs are losing important green algae, and pollution from the land is also a factor. In current ecologically-aware language: "Marine biodiversity is declining!" As a youth I could catch more flounder than my "stringer" could hold; These days, I can barely catch any, so I have mostly given up! And the fish and shellfish populations are clearly threatened; I know how difficult it was for our clammer friends Charlie and Cam to make a living. In the past couple decades, officials closed the clam flats so often, for weeks at a time, due to acid rain and pollution run-off from the land! And... I was driving through Ipswich a few months ago, seeing people holding signs about the Ipswich River, so I stopped to ask what it was all about. I found out that statistics on the disappearance of small baitfish were alarming! Yes, we are wrecking the good earth and ecosystem that God gave us, decreasing bio-diversity, with our own over-development and pollution.

Suffice it to say that regarding nature and God's Creation, we need to keep pondering the Beauty of the Earth. As Jesus said: Behold the Lilies of the field! (Behold the beauty of the fall colors!)... Step 1 is being humble, like Job, before the amazing things of nature! and then Step 2: We can ponder the many ways we are abusing our earth home, and consider what can we do to be better "stewards", better caretakers of our earth.

Care for the environment is a complex issue, even controversial at times, but I will mention some very obvious things! Yes, 30 years ago when the New Century Hymnal came out, I was singing that song "God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale" at my first church, and I thought it would become a hit, one of the most

sung songs in churches! Well, I guess not ... perhaps in the United Church of Christ, but not in the majority of Christian Churches. “Environmental Justice” (being fair to the Earth!) is still not a very big thing. Krista Tippett interviewed many people on this topic and is convinced that the younger generation is mostly on board with the need to address climate change. Want more “young families in church??” Krista is convinced that they have been waiting for churches to say and do more for our Earth, and that they would be very interested in environmental missions. The world is changing fast, and the church needs to address modern needs. Yes, some 30 years ago, in my first church (Pilgrim, Kingston-Brentwood)... it was a new thing to begin using MUGS in coffee hour rather than paper, and especially not *styrofoam* cups! Maybe a small thing, but it showed the intent to care for our earth.

I remember when we first learned about the three R’s... Recycle, Reuse, Repurpose! Good things, but I’ll admit that I can’t wrap my mind around “**Zero** Waste.” For me, I know I might go nuts if I tried to recycle, reuse, and repurpose everything. What to do with extra stuff!!! Trash is a reality of life, and we have had to admit that recently here at Belleville! Some people confuse Thrift Shop with “dumping ground,” so we had to resort to getting a dumpster recently! I know that I can feel *guilty*, when I need to send a lot of things to landfill that I just can’t find a way to reuse or repurpose! I also feel *good* that I found a guy who will pick up metal and bring it to some metal recycling place!

Recycle, Reuse, and Repurpose may not sound very spiritual at first, but it can be considered love in action, “Creation Care!” I remember when I was with the Pentecostal Church of Chile in the late 90’s. I was amazed that they had a group, in a lovely wooded retreat center, who coined the word “Creaccion.” In English we

might say: “Creaction.” (Creation Action!) The Pentecostal Church may be largely about individuals being born again in the spirit, but this group in Chile got totally into the movement of recycling and reducing waste, as a way to honor God, the Creator of the birds and the flowers, the beauty of nature.

Any one of us can come up with some ideas of how our church can promote Caring for our Earth. Many UCC churches have made a pledge to commit to environmental justice; this means studying about it and then acting. I admit that I have not stayed up with all the latest advancements in Energy Saving, and “sustainable” ways of living. Perhaps someone who has strong interest (and we do have a few!) could lead or co-lead a new small group of people, to study what churches and other faith communities have been doing. Heating as efficiently as possible is one obvious topic, and I know we have people interested in that!

My contribution right now is to emphasize the biblical mandate for Creation Care... not only Job and various Psalms standing in awe of creation, but the famous verse in Genesis that we humans are to have “dominion” over the earth and its creatures. The point is well made that the Hebrew word for dominion does not mean control, or domination of the earth. No, it means: Be stewards of the earth, Care for the earth!

Step 1: The spiritual stance of awe and praise, ends with Step 2: Caring action! Creaccion’... Creation Action! Amen!