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Psalm 24

Ephesians 1:3-14

Mark 6:14-29

60 years ago Aldo Leopold's *"A Sand County Almanac"* was published. This work, which is often viewed as the first popular work on the emerging field of ecology, went largely unnoticed for a number of years. But it really revolutionized the way natural scientists view the world, that is, collectively. One of the most radical statements in the book is simply this ***"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."*** This is Leopold's "Land Ethic". This was a radical step in that it recognizes land on the community level. It recognizes that the soil, water, plants, animals including humans is an integral part of the biota. Collectively we are all "the land". We are collectively a functioning community. Furthermore, it was radical in that it no longer allows for us to view creation as a commodity.

About a year ago an organization ran some public service announcements calling for the need to address climate change. That in itself isn't all that notable, but this one really struck me. It struck me because the two people sharing the stage were none other than Al Sharpton and Pat Robertson. It's filmed on a beach – probably because there wasn't any other way to get those two into the same room together! It struck me, because here are two people from polar opposite sides of the Theological and political spectrum agreeing on the need to address this issue from a Christian perspective. It was a radical approach. It was out of the ordinary and in that respect it was distinctly Christian.

As radical as Leopold and the commercial I mentioned might be; they have nothing on John the Baptist. This entire text from Mark's Gospel would probably make a highly rated made-for-TV summer movie of the week. Still, from the very beginning, John plays an important role in Mark's Gospel. He is the first to proclaim that the Son of God has come and the Kingdom is at hand. In this case Mark is using this story to foreshadow the trial and execution of Jesus, while at the same time making a rather bold indictment about authority and abuse of power.

There is no doubt that John is a radical. John is fanatical enough, perhaps brave enough, and even crazy enough, to speak the truth to power. Just as John's execution foreshadows Christ's trial and execution so does his message that allegiance isn't to be with Rome or their henchmen, or even to the religious authorities, it is to be placed with Jesus and with God. With his pronouncement and then martyrdom, John counsels us to turn away from anything and everything that might hinder ultimate allegiance to Jesus and God. Just imagine the ramifications of that shifting allegiance, even in our own world. The political, economic, and social subversions would be almost endless — peace-making instead of war mongering, liberation not exploitation, sacrifice rather than subjugation, mercy not vengeance, care for the vulnerable instead of privileges for the powerful, generosity instead of greed, humility rather than hubris, embrace rather than exclusion. We follow this allegiance by preparing space for the presence of the Jesus in our own lives. When we do that, we'll find ourselves in the truly Good News that subverts and transcends all politics and yes, dare I say even religious dogma.

You're probably asking yourselves about now, how does this relate to "going green".

In the Psalm we read together, we are reminded that all of Creation is God's. The psalms have a way of reminding us just where we fit into the big picture. In the Epistle lesson, the writer is telling the people of Ephesus that while God works on a cosmic scale – all of creation is included in his plan – each of us is part of that greater picture. God works on a macro as well as a micro scale and each of us are integral to that work.

Building upon that concept, it is probably of value to talk a bit about how the Pauline world viewed creation. One view is that of Paul and his world in the apocalyptic sense. As a Jew, Paul was concerned with keeping a balance – a sense of correctness - between Creation – which includes human beings – and God. Paul saw Christ's death and resurrection as God reconciling all of Creation back to God. That is evident in Col 1:15 where Paul speaks of Christ as the firstborn of all Creation. God was revealed in Christ and accordingly, Christ came to redeem the whole of Creation and not just humans.

In his Letter to the Romans, Paul speaks of creation "groaning in labor pains". These groans are not the groans of death or of giving up! Not at all! Paul is referring to a mother giving birth – giving birth to a new Creation. A new Creation that is reconciled with God through Christ. As children of God, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we are given the task of continuing the reconciliation with Creation that Christ began.

As a scientist, I've been watching and reading about climate change for nearly 20 years. The first publications about how it could affect fish came out when I was in graduate school in the late 1980's. As a student of theology, I've been watching and reading about climate change in a new light for just over a year. Rather than just focusing on how these changes could potentially affect the environment, I've become even more interested in how they may affect people. The first denominational statement on the effects of climate change on creation, issued by the American Baptist Church, appeared in 1988; about the same time that first article about fish appeared.

As Christians we should be even more concerned that the science community. We should realize that we have been entrusted with the care and stewardship of God's creation. We should be concerned because environmental problems are people problems. While it is frightening to think what could potentially happen to wild creatures it is even more frightening to think of what may become of God's children.

Expansion of the Sahara desert threatens water supplies to millions of people in sub-Saharan Africa. Rising sea levels threaten to displace native villagers in Alaska and countless numbers people in coastal areas of South East Asia.

In Minnesota, it is predicted that our summers will be more like those currently experience in Kansas and Oklahoma. Our winters more like Illinois.

For some of us that may just mean turning on the air conditioning more often than we currently do. For others less fortunate it may mean health concerns like asthma or heat stroke because they don't have the means to afford air conditioning. For people in sub-Saharan Africa and South East Asia it likely means migration or relocation, ultimately forcing people to share or fight over already limited resources. For all of us it means increased exposure to diseases. In the end, all of these environmental issues are global issues of justice.

As Christians we should be demanding better stewardship of God's planet. As Christians we should be living examples of good stewardship. As Christians we need to follow the lead of John the Baptist and speak truth to power.

More specifically, as United Methodists, I suggest we use the "Three Simple Rules" test with regard to environmental stewardship.

1. Do No Harm.
2. Do Good.
3. Stay in Love with God.

**Do No Harm.** No "green washing" here either. We need dramatic, radical action here and that doesn't mean pushing our problem off onto someone or to someplace else. You might recall the big hoopla over the spotted owl 20 years ago or so. Their decline basically shut down old-growth logging in the Pacific Northwest. But did you realize that our consumption of old-growth wood has actually increased in that time period? We've simply pushed our problems onto someone else. Doing less harm isn't the same as doing NO harm. Simply doing less harm isn't going to solve the problem.

**Do Good.** Environmental justice and economic justice go hand in hand. Cutting emissions, planting trees, all of that is good! We need more! As Christians we need to be the leaders in doing good things! We need to be the ultimate "do-gooders".

**Stay in Love with God's Creation.** Ok, so that's a little modification. Environmental stewardship is a spiritual issue. We experience God in all of nature. We are surrounded by a cosmos that St. Thomas Aquinas notes is brimming with a vitality that is meant to prompt our gratitude and embrace. God is not so abstract and far removed as not to be present or nonexistent; NO! God is so near and so actual in everything around us that he cannot be defined. Author G.K. Chesterton notes that God is always bearing down on or pushing up through the world, finally and definitively through Christ and us, his church.

How can one look into a night sky or a tranquil lake or a mountain range or even your own garden and not be in love with God and all that has been created and entrusted to us?

By following these three simple rules, we have the potential to move beyond Leopold's ethic into our own Christian ethos of how to care for the land. It becomes second nature to us.

The late Paul Gruchow once wrote about a speech given by agrarian and visionary Wes Jackson at Hamline University. After Jackson's speech a young man in the audience asked him what he could do to make the world a better place, something that was real. Gruchow notes that Jackson didn't hesitate and said "Go home and plant a garden". What wonderful advice.

A garden directly connects us to the creation process. Digging in the soil, planting the seeds, harvesting the fruit or the just watching the flowers, it all grounds us in the creation process. You're doing that here and you're doing in a manner that not only grounds you to the creation but in a manner that builds community, and if there is one thing that makes this ministry of yours uniquely Christian it is that it is building community. That's beautiful and it is a good starting point. Share your radical ideas! As you continue that reconciliation with Creation, remember that you are also in a very Wesleyan manner being evangelists! That's the kind of radical, Christian environmentalism that would make even John the Baptist stand up and take note.

**Resources:**

*A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold

Unitedmethodeviations - <http://doroteos2.wordpress.com/>

Union of Concerned Scientists - [http://www.ucsusa.org/global\\_warming/science\\_and\\_impacts/impacts/](http://www.ucsusa.org/global_warming/science_and_impacts/impacts/)

*The Power of Rural Stories* by Paul Gruchow - [http://www.luthersem.edu/word&world/Archives/20-2\\_Rural\\_America/20-2\\_Gruchow.pdf](http://www.luthersem.edu/word&world/Archives/20-2_Rural_America/20-2_Gruchow.pdf)