

SPOILER ALERT: April is Environmental Stewardship Month

Environmental stewardship refers to responsible use and protection of the natural environment through conservation and sustainable practices. Each week during April, we will focus on a specific element of God's Creation that we are called upon to nurture. The Book of Genesis tells us that after God created the heavens and the earth and all that is therein, He pronounced it "Good." God then gave humans the responsibility for being the stewards of His Creation. We have not done as God instructed. We have abused His Creation, exploiting it out of greed and carelessness. In May 2016 the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued an alarming report on the effects of our squandering. The report states, in part:

The problems have gotten so bad that the panel had to add a new and dangerous level of risks, "very high." One participant commented that it might as well be called a "horrible" risk level. "The horrible is something quite likely, and we won't be able to do anything about it." The report predicts that the highest level of risk would first hit plants and animals, both on land and in the acidifying oceans.

"In recent decades, changes in climate have caused impacts on natural and human systems on all continents and across the oceans." And if society doesn't change, the future looks even worse: "Increasing magnitudes of warming increase the likelihood of severe, pervasive, and irreversible impacts." The report, the fifth on warming's impacts, includes risks to the ecosystems of the Earth, including a thawing Arctic, but it is far more oriented to what it means to people than past versions. Climate change will worsen problems that society already has, such as poverty, sickness, violence and refugees. While the problems from global warming will hit everyone in some way, the magnitude of the harm won't be equal, coming down harder on people who can least afford it. It will increase the gaps between the rich and poor, healthy and sick, young and old, and men and women. And on the other end, it will act as a brake slowing down the benefits of a modernizing society, such as regular economic growth and more efficient crop production.

The report also notes that one major area of risk is that with increased warming, incredibly dramatic but ultra-rare single major climate events, sometimes called tipping points, become more possible with huge consequences for the globe. These are events like the melting of the Greenland ice sheet, which would take more than 1,000 years.

But the report's authors say there are actions that can be taken to mitigate the problems, if we act swiftly and broadly. We have less than 10 years to implement these actions before our planet passes the "point of no return." This will take a commitment to Environmental Stewardship on the part of individuals and nations worldwide. Let it begin with us. And let us sound the alarm unceasingly to defend God's "Good" Creation from this global disaster created by the very humans He charged with protecting it.

(Sources: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/30/un-climate-change-report_n_5060317.html and <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/> and the full report at https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/syr/SYR_AR5_FINAL_full_wcover.pdf with an update published in 2018 at <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>)

Originally we had planned to observe the Presbyterian-led **Clean Water Sunday** initiative (read more at <https://www.livingwatersfortheworld.org/>), inspired by the UN "World Water Day" on April 5. Recent events have pushed that to later in the year. But there's still much we can do "together apart" while we strive to stay healthy in this time of crisis. Stay tuned for lots of ways we can heed God's call to care for our Home.