

Earth Day Sermon delivered by Tim Darst at St. Paul's Episcopal, New Albany, IN and Episcopal Church of the Advent, Louisville, KY on April 18 and 25 respectively.

Genesis 2:7 says "then the Lord God formed man of the dust of the earth" the Hebrew word for *man* is *Adam* or *aDAM* and the word for earth is *AdaMAH*. Adam from Adamah, like humans from humus. We are of the earth. We depend upon it. We would die without it.

Genesis 2:15 says God placed Adam in the garden to till and keep it. The Hebrew word for *keep* is *shammar* which means "to care for and protect." This is one of the first jobs that God gave to humans – to protect the earth. [pause, look at congregation] Are you doing that? How's that going?

Genesis 1:26 says that we "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth." The Hebrew word for dominion *radah* means "higher on the root of a plant." It doesn't mean ownership or unrestricted use. We are given dominion because we have a special place in creation. We have the job of to protecting creation but we also have the ability to destroy it. No other species has such an awesome power. With that awesome power comes awesome responsibility. I look at responsibility as: the ability to respond.

- The people who live in the mountain communities of Appalachia need us to respond
- The polar bears need us to respond.
- All endangered species need us to respond.
- Elderly with COPD need us to respond.
- Children with asthma need us to respond.

Parents have dominion over their children. I have two daughters and, when they were young, my wife and I had dominion over them. Our job was to protect them and provide them with their basic needs. When we dropped them off as school, their teachers had dominion over them and we expected them to returned to us unharmed. We did not have the right to abuse our dominion.

If a neighbor were to lend you their car, you would have dominion over their car. You could use it but would be expected to return it in the same condition to your neighbor; presumably with the same amount of gas in it.

Genesis 1:28 tells us to "be fruitful and multiply." Okay, we've done that. We can check that off our list. We have in fact an overpopulation problem. One way to look at population growth from the last 10,000 years to is to condense it into a 12-month calendar. So, January 1st would represent the year 8000BC and December 31st would represent the year 2000. Each day would represent about 27 years. Do you follow me? In July, people start writing, using iron tools, and building libraries. In October, Jesus lives, dies and is resurrected. December 24 is a big day, humanity reaches the one billion mark. On December 29 just 5 days later, we reach 2 billion. We add another billion on

the 30th and on the 31st, we add a billion in the morning, another in the afternoon and another before midnight. That is how we have gotten to almost 7 billion people today. If we continue growing at this rate and add a checkmark on the calendar for each billion we hit. We will have 60 million checkmarks on January 1st.

All of the nearly 7 billion people on the planet need food, clothing, housing, clean water. They want electricity and cars and all those things we Americans all have. It would take five earths to accomplish that.

This past Thursday marked the 40th anniversary of the first Earth Day. If nothing else, Earth Day is a good opportunity for us to look at how we are caring for the earth. Are we Using our resources wisely? Are we only using our fair share? While Americans make up only 5% of the world population, we use 25% of its resources.

The good news is that we still have time to change this and it's not about sacrifice. It's about making choices that are more joyful and life giving. Sure we all have a problem with change, but it's easier to change voluntarily now than to be forced to change later.

My wife and I took a good look at our life about 8 years ago. First we looked at our electricity use. Mainly because we knew that 95% of Kentucky's electricity comes from coal and coal is the dirtiest of the fossil fuels, and we blow up mountains and fill in streams to get to it. So, we replaced our incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent ones. You know the ones I'm talking about – the curly ones.

We replaced our old refrigerator with an EnergyStar model because it was wasting energy 24/7.

We turned off lights when we left a room and the tv when we weren't watching it.

We bought an EnergyStar washer and dryer and I quit using the dryer all together. I now use what I call a solar-powered clothes dryer that my wife reminds me is simply a clothes line.

We installed ceiling fans and reduced our air conditioning use.

We also found that many appliances use electricity even when turned off. We now plug them into power strips and turn off the power strips to stop those "phantom loads." We didn't do all this overnight we did it slowly over four years. By the end of the four years we had reduced our energy use by 70%!

Other things we did include buying much of our food from local sources and growing some of our own because the average food item travels 1500 miles before it reaches our table. We visit the farmers' market and look for local products at the grocery.

We try not to buy things with a lot of packaging. We try to reduce what we buy, period. We try to buy reusable items and not disposables. We now buy our milk in returnable glass bottles and don't buy bottled water.

All of these changes we have made we made slowly. We made these changes voluntarily and joyfully. We made these changes in order to live more simply and tread lightly on the earth. We made these choices to be more loving to our neighbors by not polluting our neighbor's air or water.

You too can make choices that bring you closer to caring for creation. Start small, move slowly. The important thing is to keep moving, keep growing keep improving keep moving closer to the life that God wants us to live.

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks of his sheep being able to recognize his voice and listen to what he says and follow Him. As Christians we must interpret the signs of the times and apply the Gospel message to them. As Jesus says, "The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me." We should also do works in the name of the Father and those works will testify to us.

Environmental degradation is a social problem like slavery was and racism and sexism and child labor. People of faith led the country away from those social problems and people of faith will lead us out of this problem.

The Rev. Sally Bingham of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco said, "I believe that folks who sit in the pew, who profess a love for God are the ones who should be leading this movement." Remember, in Genesis, God asks us to protect the earth. How are you going to do that?

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