

Creation Care 101

Sundays, 2nd Service
January 8 – February 12

L I F E
T O G E T H E R



Creation Care 101



Humanity is made in the image of God, meaning we are his reflection and his representation on this earth. It also means we have been given responsibilities. One of these responsibilities is caring for creation. In Genesis 1, God saw that his creation was “very good,” then encourages humanity to team with him in stewarding it. What does that really mean, and what are the implications for our life today? That’s what we will explore in this Life Together segment.

Schedule

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| 3. 1/22/23 | The Miracle of Consciousness |
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Matter Matters

1/8/23



Matter Matters

1/8/23



Questions

- Do you feel the culture shaping you in different ways in this area? If so, how? If it is negatively (as in “objectifying” nature), how can you resist the negative influence?
- “Image” can be thought of in three words: reflection, representation and responsibility. After thinking through these three words, how does that impact how you view creation?
- Do you live with an attitude of gratitude? If not, can you make that your prayer this week?
- In general, are you content with what you have? Why or why not? Where are you typically tempted to be discontented? What are practical ways that can help you resist falling into the “consumer” trap?
- What “baby steps” can you take this week in the direction of creation care? How can these “baby steps” become habits in your life?



The Temple of Creation

1/15/23

- I. Creation as God's Temple
- II. The Human Task



The Temple of Creation

1/15/23



I. Creation as God's Temple

*One thing I ask from the LORD,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple.*

Ps 27:4

In one sense, the temple itself is meant to be a model of creation, and in this it follows tradition and ancient near-eastern religion generally. In this ancient pattern the last thing to be placed in the temple in temple construction was the image of the God. And who is the image of the God in the Biblical story? It's us! We, in a sense, represent God in the temple as the priest does, but also in creation because the other side of the story, of course, is that creation itself is the temple.

The Temple of Creation

1/15/23



I. Creation as God's Temple

When we read, 'One thing I have asked of the Lord that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to behold the beauty of the Lord and seek Him in His temple' – it's not simply talking about going to church; the psalmist is talking about seeing God in His dwelling place, which is creation.

Questions

- What are some of the practical implications of seeing creation as God's Temple?
- What does that insight imply for 'we who are water and dust'?
- What does it imply for the rest of creation?
- What does it imply for God the Creator who has 'become flesh and dwelt among us'?

The Temple of Creation

1/15/23



II. The Human Task

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." ...

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Gen 1:26-28; 2:15

The Temple of Creation

1/15/23



II. The Human Task

Genesis 1 contains the famous, often criticized verses in which God is said to have created man in his own image and given him dominion and told him to rule. These are not easy words. In Hebrew, they both refer to something that's done with the feet and something that's done as an exercise of our power. As a result, the environmental community over the years has said, yes, that's the problem with Christians: they think they're made to lord it over the earth and to have dominion.

But, if you stop the Biblical story in Genesis 1:28, you miss the most important thing about the nature of human power which comes in the very next chapter – the story of Adam. Adam is placed in a garden and is told to do two things: to till it (the Hebrew word for till is 'abad' which is the basic word to serve, to be a servant of) and to keep it, to watch over it. It's the same word that's used later in the Aaronic blessing: "May the Lord bless you and keep you": we're to keep the garden as we hope God keeps us. We're to serve the garden.

The Temple of Creation

1/15/23



II. The Human Task

There's a sense in which the whole Biblical story is to be understood as God's long lesson to humans about how to use power. Do we use it as forceful dominion or do we use it as responsive, loving service?

Questions

- What examples can you think of that illustrate those two contrasting approaches to power – forceful dominion vs. loving service – both in the Biblical story and in human experience generally?

Gardener

When Mary Magdelene Saw
Christ at dawn
In the tomb-haunted grove She
thought he was the gardener
Then saw He was the Christ

But still she was mistaken Not
seeing that
The flowers in the rock The
grass,
The gnarled, deep-rooted olive trees The
rock itself
Were rooted in his flesh
And nourished by his fresh-shed blood.

For Christ was gardener of that place But hid
his workman's hands,
The flowers of his flesh, Lest
the young church see
Persephone,
Osiris,
Or only wild Pan
And not the God beyond the world Who
made it
For our flesh
And His
And tends, in each new Adam,
The garden of His earth
Loren Wilkinson



The Miracle of Consciousness

1/22/23

- I. In the Center of Immensities**
- II. Christianity and the Rise of Science**



The Miracle of Consciousness

1/22/23



I. In the Center of Immensities

LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory in the heavens.

*Through the praise of children and infants
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.*

*When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?*

*You have made them a little lower than the angels (God)
and crowned them with glory and honor.*

*You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet:
all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky,
and the fish in the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.*

LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Ps 8

The Miracle of Consciousness

1/22/23



I. In the Center of Immensities

Some thinkers have talked about ‘the principle of mediocrity’; that is, that there’s really nothing special about the earth. We used to think it was the center of the universe, but now we know that it’s just one tiny planet on the edge of one galaxy that’s one of billions and billions of galaxies, so nothing special. But this doesn’t ring true. Because I’m not just looking at this splendid country around me, this horizon that encircles me. I’m in the center of it, and I’m conscious in the center of it. I’m able to think about it, to see it, to wonder at it, to want to study it, to want to paint it, to write a poem about it. And so far as we know there’s nothing like that consciousness anywhere else in the universe.

The Miracle of Consciousness

1/22/23



I. In the Center of Immensities

Questions

- Granted that there are parallels between human and animal consciousness – what are some of the things that seem to make human consciousness unique?
- In what sense is it a gift to be conscious?
- In what sense is it a problem?
- What does the uniqueness of human consciousness imply for the rest of creation?

The Miracle of Consciousness

1/22/23



II. Christianity and the Rise of Science

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.*

Ps 19:1-3

The Miracle of Consciousness

1/22/23



II. Christianity and the Rise of Science

Johannes Kepler, who discovered the laws of planetary motion, is a key figure in the rise of modern science. He represents a great turning point in western culture, when there was a movement away from thinking about the world in terms of ancient Greek philosophy and patterns of thought, to thinking about the world in what we might call 'Christian terms' – empirical terms that take the senses very seriously.

For the ancient Greeks, anything that changes is not real – and this world changes! What they were always looking for was an eternal idea or ideal. But with the rise of Christian theology, this world suddenly became the place that was real, that mattered. This was the location of the Incarnation. Suddenly history is a place where God is too. And that really made a difference to how we approach nature.

The Miracle of Consciousness

1/22/23



II. Christianity and the Rise of Science

It means nature is now more a work of art than something to be decoded. And a work of art is to be touched and tasted and smelled and looked at and loved. And so that is how people started to approach the study of nature, as you would a work of art. In other words, you need the senses.

Kepler firmly believed that he was the first person to have actually seen this art for what it was, this arrangement of the sun and of the planets. He said in the prologue of his book, "I don't care if there is no reader who believes what I've written here. It doesn't matter if nobody understands what I've discovered here. After all, God has waited thousands and thousands of years for an observer. What do I care if I have to wait 100 years for a reader?" He saw himself as the art-appreciator in residence, and God as the great artist.

The Miracle of Consciousness

1/22/23



II. Christianity and the Rise of Science

Questions

- Why does the Christian belief in the Incarnation provide a fertile ground for science?
- What is the difference between saying, on the one hand, that the world is like a machine, and on the other, like a work of art?
- Kepler, given the task of calculating the precise orbit of Mars based on years of observational data inherited from Tycho Brahe, wanted to prove the orbit to be perfectly circular. He found to his consternation that it was not circular; rather the data required him to conclude that it was elliptical (hence the first law of planetary motion). What kind of creator is implied by the assumption of a circular orbit? What kind of creator is implied by the discovery of an elliptical orbit?
- If a main way of being God's image bearers is to be 'art appreciators in residence,' what does that imply for how we exercise 'dominion' in creation?

The Earth

*God loafs around heaven,
without a shape
but He would like to smoke His cigar
or bite His fingernails
and so forth.*

*God owns heaven
but He craves the earth,
the earth with its little sleepy caves,
its bird resting at the kitchen window,
even its murders lined up like broken chairs,
even its writers digging into their souls with jackhammers,
even its hucksters selling their animals for gold,
even its babies sniffing for their music,
the farmhouse, white as a bone,
sitting in the lap of its corn,
even the statue holding up its widowed life,
but most of all He envies the bodies,
He who has no body.*

*The eyes, opening and shutting like keyholes
and never forgetting, recording by thousands,
the skull with its brains like eels-
the tablet of the world-
the bones and their joints
that build and break for any trick, the genitals,
the ballast of the eternal,
and the heart, of course,
that swallows the tides
and spits them out cleansed.*

*He does not envy the soul so much. He is all soul but
He would like to house it in a body and come down
and give it a bath now and then.*

Annie Sexton



Creation Care in Action
1/29/23



ROCKSIDE RANCH



Our Lost First Task

2/5/23

- I. Human Beings & the Cycles of Creation**
- II. Ocean Degradation**



Our Lost First Task

2/5/23



I. Human Beings & the Cycles of Creation

*What do people gain from all their labors
at which they toil under the sun?*

*Generations come and generations go,
but the earth remains forever.*

*The sun rises and the sun sets,
and hurries back to where it rises.*

*The wind blows to the south
and turns to the north;
round and round it goes,
ever returning on its course.*

*All streams flow into the sea,
yet the sea is never full.*

*To the place the streams come from,
there they return again.*

Eccl 1:3-7

Our Lost First Task

2/5/23



I. Human Beings & the Cycles of Creation

We live our lives in the middle of the cycles of nature. But our lives don't go in circles – they go in a straight line. They begin with our birth; they end with our death. But that end is not an end in the sense of 'telos,' of purpose. It is an end in the sense of termination. We're cut off, and left with the question – what does it mean? What are we here for? The natural world in all its beauty and splendor certainly has the ability to take our breath away and make our hearts soar. But there's no getting away from the fact that nature also confronts us continually with the reality of mortality and death. It's good to live in tune with the cycles of nature – day and night, rivers running into the sea, the ebb and flow of the tide. And yet, there's a kind of emptiness to those cycles. The writer of Ecclesiastes said that all rivers run into the sea and yet the sea is not full. The same things happen again and again and again. In fact, in Eastern religions, the circle is an image of life but it is also an image of emptiness.

Our Lost First Task

2/5/23



I. Human Beings & the Cycles of Creation

The writer of Ecclesiastes said that all rivers run into the sea and yet the sea is not full. The same things happen again and again and again. In fact, in Eastern religions, the circle is an image of life, but it is also an image of emptiness. It is something people want to escape from: they wish to get off the wheel of existence, because nature – wonderful as it is – doesn't go anywhere. It doesn't go in a line, but rather circles, and that's not always good news.

Our Lost First Task

2/5/23



I. Human Beings & the Cycles of Creation

Questions

- How can we recover an authentic way of being human? Does the answer lie as some environmentalists suggest in some kind of return to nature?
- Is being human to be fully 'natural'? Or do we need a concept bigger and richer than 'nature' to help us understand our humanity? What might such a concept be?
- If humanity is what 'nature' (by the supposedly random processes of 'evolution') has produced, then why should we be at all concerned about the human impact on nature? Aren't the environmental problems we face simply the latest thing that 'nature' is doing?

Our Lost First Task

2/5/23



II. Ocean Degradation

*Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in Gad,
for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.
My soul is downcast within me;
therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan,
the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.
Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers have swept over me.
By day the LORD directs his love,
at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.
Ps 42:5-8*

Our Lost First Task

2/5/23



II. Ocean Degradation

How we live in relation to the natural world is not just a matter of concern to nature lovers, scientists or ecological campaigners. Almost every day there seem to be new revelations of the profound damage that we human beings have inflicted on the planet in the last hundred years. And nowhere is this clearer than in our relation to the oceans.

For a long time scientists who were studying climate change thought that there should have been more carbon dioxide building up in the atmosphere, and they couldn't figure out where it was all going. It was only a few years ago that it was clearly established that the reason climate change wasn't happening faster was that the carbon was going into the ocean, building up as carbonic acid. The oceans today are measurably more acidic than they were 100 years ago; by about 30%. We can hardly imagine how serious this problem is. The oceans have always been an image of life, of eternity. The ocean is like the great womb of life.

Our Lost First Task

2/5/23



II. Ocean Degradation

And so, to begin to come to terms with the death of the oceans is almost unthinkable, especially when we realize that the processes that are now just beginning to show up in the oceans, the processes of carbon in the atmosphere, are going into the oceans. Even if we stopped them, even if we levelled off our carbon emission today, it would continue for centuries. The oceans are going to get worse.

There's nothing we can do about it.

Does the state of the oceans mean that we are left with a hopeless situation? We humans are an ingenious species, and we've changed before, and people are becoming more aware – there's a lot of concern about the state of the oceans. So there are reasons to look at it optimistically. But, I think we also have to recognize that there is a profound death occurring. As Christians, we can look at how we live, but ultimately we need to go back to the fact that we worship a God of resurrections.

Our Lost First Task

2/5/23



II. Ocean Degradation

Questions

- How can we take better care of this beautiful, fragile planet that is our home?
- We have – largely out of ignorance – started processes that will, despite our best efforts, lead to much destruction. Thus a common environmentalist attitude is despair – or a kind of anti-humanism that says: humanity is a blight, a mistake of nature. On the other hand, a common Christian response is to say: these are the end times – only God can fix it now. So perhaps we should hasten environmental degradation – maybe it will hasten the return of Christ. What other attitudes might a Christian have?
- What does the Resurrection of Jesus imply for our life on the earth now?

Our Lost First Task

2/5/23



II. Ocean Degradation

Questions

“The whole point of what Jesus was up to was that he was doing close up, in the present, what he was promising long-term in the future. And what he was promising for that future and doing in the present was not saving souls for a disembodied eternity but rescuing people from the corruption and decay of the way the world presently is so they could enjoy, already in the present, that renewal of creation which is God’s ultimate purpose – and so they could thus become colleagues and partners in the large project.” What do these words of NT Wright imply for the life of the oceans and the earth?



The Gardener & His World

2/12/23

- I. The Celtic Cross**
- II. The Self-Emptying God**
- III. Art and Creation**



The Gardener & His World

2/12/23



I. The Celtic Cross

Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!

Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Phil 2:1-11

The Gardener & His World

2/12/23



I. The Celtic Cross

The Celtic cross combines two powerful symbols. One is a circle, a picture of life and the circles of life, and of creation. The other is the cross, and the cross, of course, is the picture of an event – the event of the crucifixion of Jesus. Is is the picture of the love of God. But the important thing is that the circle does not contain the cross – the cross contains the circle. It is bigger than the circle, and suggests that the love of God is at the center of creation.

Questions

An inescapable part of the circles and cycles of biological life is that they depend on death. (Consider the simple act of eating – it has been said that ‘ecology is the science of who is eating who.’) One answer to the dilemma this poses for those who believe God’s creation is good is to say that these circles of birth, growth, nutrition, death and decay are part of a ‘fallen’ world. The Celtic cross suggests a deeper answer: that risk and vulnerability are at the heart of any relationship of love and care. Can we say that of God’s relationship to creation? Can we say it of our own?

The Gardener & His World

2/12/23



II. The Self-Emptying God

*Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my salvation and my God.*

*My soul is cast down within me;
therefore I remember you
from the land of Jordan and of Hermon,
from Mount Mizar.*

*Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls;
all your breakers and your waves
have gone over me.*

*By day the LORD commands his steadfast love,
and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.*

Ps 42:5-8

The Gardener & His World

2/12/23



II. The Self-Emptying God

*And Can It Be
He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race;
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O God, it found out me.*

*Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me.*
Charles Wesley

The Gardener & His World

2/12/23



II. The Self-Emptying God

The Celtic cross with its picture of the suffering Christ at the center of the circles of creation, is a picture of how we, ourselves, are to be in creation, and be in relationship to each other. It suggests that at the very center of creation is a profound act of self-emptying. It is as though God is holding back his power in order to let creation have space to exist, to be itself, and to exercise genuine freedom.

Questions

The Philippians 2 passage about God's kenosis or self-emptying in Jesus is within the context of how we relate to other people. It says that instead of 'looking to our own interests' we ought to 'look to the interests of others,' and centers that reversal of our self-centered tendencies in the 'obedience' of Jesus on the cross. What do you think of the idea that this cross-shaped pattern might have relevance for how we treat creation generally? What are some of the particular ways in which it might influence our behavior?

The Gardener & His World

2/12/23



III. Art and Creation

Perhaps one of the most beautiful and amazing things that grows out of our love for this miracle of life is art. We find ourselves in a world we couldn't have made, that surprises us, that delights us, and we find ourselves capable of responding to it in ways that draw on our own depth and creativity. We take the surprise of this world, process it in our own creativity, and give it back to the world in a way that makes that surprising nature of things accessible to other people.

What art does is create an occasion for our ability to sense things other than ourselves; to be empathetic, to love things other than ourselves, and to use our powers not simply to impose our will, but to let things shine forth, let them be what they are, to let them be seen by others and to let the thing that is being celebrated through art be seen for what it is.

All of this seems to be deeply rooted in the character and actions of the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. God creates us, not simply by imposing his power and his will on us. He gives us the space to be what he creates us to be. He creates not by imposing his will on us but by letting us unfold into what we are. That's what the human artist does as well: she takes other things and lets them be, lets them unfold in their possibilities.

The Gardener & His World

2/12/23



III. Art and Creation

Questions

- The refrain that closes the description of the days of creation in Genesis is often misquoted as 'And God said that it was good...' But the actual words are significantly different: 'And God saw that it was good..' What is the difference between 'saying' something is good, and 'seeing' that it is good? What might that difference tell us about God's actions in creation – and our own?
- What might it imply for how we love, serve, wonder at and care for this miraculous gift of a world we find ourselves in?

Imago Mundi

*Pouring from the west the sea-wind batters the town,
Strews branches like the wrack of tides
And warms the land with sea-smell.
The sea beats louder through the salt of my blood,
Whispers in my pink bones basinning basalt,
O You who wove me in the depths of earth and ocean,
Who at the birth of light and stars foresaw the far result
Of the wind of your spirit quickening my mud:
Let deeps of sea and continent rise up in me and tell
That the whispering in the earthquake and the surf
Is the shout of your life in we who are water and dust*

*The late light slakes blown by the dawn wind
In the garden are stars of ice and air and sparkle
In the dark-branched shrub of my lung.
In alveolar lace there iron rusts and rushes
Blood-borne to my body's billion fires
Whose fuel is the heavy ash of stars,
Scattered from the novae of their pyres:
Carbon, and the ferrous rust that pushes
Wordless blood to my unbound tongue
To praise: that the God of the cosmos
Let the heavens come to speech in me.*

Imago Mundi (cont)

*Now in the darkening afternoon
The animals watch from the garden's verge,
Shaped like versions of myself in the forests of my sleep
(Though I wake to kill them and eat).
Caught by their horns in our thickets they thresh
To escape us, the birds and the beasts.
And still through the ripped veils of their flesh
We enter with trampling feet
The violent sanctum of our unkept Keep:
And no slain lamb or ram nor any blood of bull or dove
Can give back the peace of our lost first task.*

*Creation waits now for the gardener to speak:
And the eager weeds await their release
From the bondage of being weeds.
Eden and Zion lie far apart
But atom and ocean, beasts and plants
Wait for the one who will grant them peace.
Then the planet will spin in a sabbath dance
(And the dancing place will be the heart).
Fruit will burgeon from scattered seeds
And garden and town be clean as a fleece
Early in the morning, on the first day of the week.*

Loren Wilkinson



Appendices

- I. Praying in Creation
- II. Additional Resources



Praying in Creation

By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can't see: eternal power, for instance, and the mystery of his divine being. So nobody has a good excuse.

The goodness, creativity and life-giving spirit of God are manifest in His creation. Therefore, we often feel close to God when we are in natural surroundings. Taking advantage of times spent in creation can be a real blessing to us in experiencing closeness with God. Begin by praying to be available to God's presence as you take a walk through creation.

First, tell God it is your intention to listen and look for His presence in creation.

- Go for your walk alone and deliberately slow down your pace.
- Stay alert to the outside world rather than mulling over things in your head.
- Use your eyes to take in things close-up and at a distance.
- Pay attention to shapes, colors and textures.
- Notice the relationship of things to one another.

What attracts your attention? Spend some time exploring this.

- Really listen both to sounds around and sounds inside you.
- Perhaps, there is a smell that you notice.
- Use touch to become aware of different textures, allow yourself to feel physically and emotionally.
- Stop whenever you want for an even closer look.

What does this bring up in you? Listen for anything God might be trying to say through creation and surroundings.

As you end your walk, you may want to take something with you – perhaps a stone or a twig or a flower – as a reminder of what you experienced.

Thank God for this time of contemplation and reflection.

Additional Resources

Books

- Bauckham, Richard, *The Bible and Ecology*
- Berry, Wendell, *Our Only World*
- Chester, Tim, *A Meal with Jesus*
- Crouch, Andy, *Culture Making*
- DeWitt, Calvin, *The Environment and the Christian*
- Goodwin, Craig, *Year of Plenty*
- Hayhoe, Katharine, *A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions* (& Ted talk)
- Kostamo, Leah, *Planted*
- Northcott, Michael, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*
- Provan, Iain, *Seriously Dangerous Religion*
- White, Robert S. (ed), *Creation in Crisis: Christian Perspectives on Sustainability*

Places

- <https://rocksideranch.org/>
- <https://arocha.org/en/>

Videos

- *Making Peace with Creation*, Regent College
- *Food Forethought* Course, Regent College