

March 29, 2020

Genesis 1:26-31
Psalm 148

This is the sixth and final justice issue, which we will be looking at on our Lenten journey Living a Just Peace Life. This week we are focusing on Climate Justice. You may recall we began this series examining the importance of A2A, Accessible to All. As a justice issue A2A is all-encompassing. We learned that if we, as a community, not just as a church building, are not accessible to those who walk in the door, looking to be in relationship with God, God's people, and all creation, then it is not possible for us to understand and/or support any of the other justice issues. Justice work is relational.

As we have learned along the way from the other justice issues we have examined, unless we are willing to walk with those in need of justice, in need of liberation, we can be of little or no help. It is only as we ally with and follow the lead of those in need of justice that we are able to understand and lend support. God's justice work, living a just peace life, is dependent on recognizing our interwoven connectedness; recognizing the truth of the Apostle Paul's words: When one suffers, we all suffer.

I don't know if you noticed or not, but, roughly, the order in which we placed the justice issues we have examined this Lenten season was in order of magnitude. Not that one is more important than another, rather the numbers of those hurting impacted. Last Sunday I spoke about violence against women. This impacts over 50% of the world population. This means we placed the justice issue with greatest numbers of those hurt last: Climate Justice.

Our world leaders' lack of concern about the climate means all of humanity and the earth itself is being negatively impacted. That financial and political leaders put the economy before climate concerns is almost understandable – not acceptable, but almost understandable. What surprises me are religious leaders who maintain the planet is ours to ravage. They point to the very passage from Genesis that I just read to justify the misuse of Mother Earth. They point to the verse that says, “fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion.”

I have to admit “subdue” and “dominion” have a rather heavy-handed feel to them. But, but, God has other plans for our living life with the planet earth. Today's reading opened with “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion.’” Our dominion is to mirror God's dominion over us. We were made to be like God, in the image of God. I know there are some very violent and wrathful images of God in Hebrew Scriptures, but Scripture also tells us God's love is steadfast and never-ending and that God is always there to liberate and restore all who seek the Holy One.

The Genesis passage also tells us “God saw everything that had been made, and indeed, it was very good.” When we see in our country and around the world the environmental degradation of the earth, would God still say, “and indeed, it is very good”?

The bottom line is our “dominion” over the earth is to mirror God's dominion over us. My understanding of God's dominion is a desire to build up each person, each part of creation to be all God created them to be; to be the best they can be; to be supported and loved.

What drives my passion about Climate Justice is an ever deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of life, all life. Birds and land animals, fish and insects, trees and rocks, water and air. All are living beings, which are part of us and we are part of them.

As odd as this may sound, our scientific knowledge is coming back around to where the biblical authors already were. In Psalm 148 the psalmist writes about the sun, moon, stars, and waters all praising God; sea monsters and weather storms, mountains and hills, trees and animals, birds and reptiles, all praising God, along with humanity. All are living things; all are created and loved by God. And it is God's love that connects us all to one another.

I would posit that we are so connected we are, in truth, one. As we learn how trees are connected, how they communicate with one another, how they support one another, we learn how we too are connected to all of creation. So, pushing for Climate Justice can be seen as self-serving. Climate Justice is about liberating myself, not just some inanimate idea called “nature.” The opposite is true as well:

Continuing our destructive dominion over our earth is suicide for humanity.

You heard me right. If we keep on this destructive path, humanity will be eliminated. We will take a large number of animal and plant species down with us, but the earth will survive just fine without us.

You have heard me, all through this sermon, speak of Climate Justice. This is because I am just uninterested in the debate around Climate Change. Our country has become so polarized around this issue, around what is and isn't science that the debate is meaningless. Is global warming happening? Are humans causing it? Haven't we had warming and freezing before?

Now, I know what side of this science debate I fall on. Still, it is unimportant. We know, we, human beings, affect our environment to the degree that we cause health problems, for humans and the rest of creation. If that wasn't true, we would not have passed the clean air act and Chicago and Los Angeles would still have amazingly colorful sunrises and sunsets, as well as more breathing problems than they presently have.

The truth is, to use the harsh words of environmentalists, we are "raping" the planet. In countries around the world, including our own, there are open coal pits, coal slurry, coal ash, carbon burning power plants, factories that drop unfiltered pollutants into rivers, farms' fertilizers are running off and poisoning water ways, a love of gasoline powered cars, and the list goes on.

The truth is we have the means to live cleaner, to lower our carbon footprint, to keep our land, water, and air cleaner. The decision to do something about this is a justice issue and the one in need of liberation is the planet earth.

Climate Change is all about us accepting the science of global warming and working hard to change it. Climate Change is about us being in charge.

Climate justice is not about us rescuing the earth. Remember the lessons we have learned from the other justice issues. We are not to take the lead. We are to listen to the pain of our planet; the pains land, water, and air suffer; the pains plants and animals suffer. We are to listen and allow them to lead us.

If we pay attention, if we listen, the world can tell us what it needs to heal. Many environmentalists have been listening very closely. They have heard and seen what heals the wounds of a suffering earth.

- Vaughn can tell you about the power of a pollinator garden and a garden with only native plants, which adds habitat for helpful insects, beautiful birds, and other interesting animals
- We are learning to include green – grass, trees, flowers – to, around, and on our buildings
- Solar panels are springing up on roof tops and carbon-powered coal plants are closing
- Many countries require new products to be fully recyclable, including, especially, packaging (including cars, by the way)
- Plastic bags are on their way out and, people are beginning to carry strong, reusable bags with them

These are just a few of the obvious things being done. What can you do?

Take some time. Take a walk. Look around you. Listen to the earth. Breathe deep. This is how you begin to build a relationship with the earth, with the "climate". Such relationship-building is the first step toward true climate justice. We have to begin somewhere and this is a good place.

One final note: We have looked at six justice issues, separately. What those on the front lines championing these justice issues know is that they are interconnected, just like the oneness of life. Until we are accessible, listening to and walking with all who are hurting, we will never fully achieve the freeing of a hurting world from bondage that our walk with God is all about.

Amicable Church has been, is, and hopefully will continue to be a place of welcome to all in need of a refuge, as well as a place where our worship will always include and lift up the most vulnerable in our world.

There is no greater worship we can offer God, the Holy One, than just such a commitment.

May God give us the listening ears, welcoming hearts, and a willingness to follow that we need for God's justice work. Amen.