

## **Creation Care: Action, Faith and Hope**

### **Genesis 1:24-31**

James Pauer  
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Hello! I am James Pauer and you might wonder who am I talking to you today? As many of you know Lynne and I have been members of this congregation for many years. I am an environmental scientist working on Great Lakes pollution issues for the Environmental Protection Agency. However, I am not speaking on behalf of the EPA, and I am not clergy – instead, I am speaking as a Christian, a member of our congregation who is concerned about our fragile earth.

I know a little about environmental issues as part of my work. I have done some reading on a few other issues such as climate change, and I try to live an environmentally responsible life – although, like many of you, some days I do better than others. I am sure there are many of you that know more than I about some aspects of this difficult issue and want to do the right thing.

For 21st century people the scripture reading sounds very outdated, very simplistic and perhaps a bit crazy; but, remember, it was written for people who understood so much less than us of the natural world, physics, chemistry, and biology. The modern-day version of the creation story would probably sound much different.

Regardless whether you believe that the earth and its inhabitants were created in seven days or billions of years - what is true is that God's creation is a beautiful and functional earth with amazing plants and animals living in it. An earth that provides us with so much: providing food, shelter, rain, and pleasant temperatures (for the most part!) Nature is beautiful, it gives us peace, it calms us down, it makes us happy. We, in Michigan, are fortunate that we have so much water around us including the Great Lakes, forest areas, plant and animal life and so much more.

God asked us to take care of His creation and to make sure we pass it on in good or even better shape to the next generation. I think the buzz term today would be: God asked us to live a sustainable life.

Pastor Nancy talked about earth and how we are called to be stewards – to take care of His creation. We need to show love to our neighbors by taking action that helps rather than hurts them.

Reverend Shonagh talked about how we consciously and unconsciously have done a lot of harm to God's creation. Although I want to present a more hopeful picture, I want to say a few more things about our impact on our planet.

It seems our country and much of the world places a very high value on the wealthy. I am always amazed that when people talk about the most successful people, it is usually the people with the most money or status.

We also put a high value on conveniences. The temperature in our house has to be the perfect temperature 365 days a year and we will install whatever is necessary and pay lots of money for it. As for transportation, it is essential to get from point A to point B in the shortest,

fastest and most convenient way – thus we pretty much drive everywhere (by ourselves). We also want our food as fresh as possible, convenient to carry, and easy to dispose of; therefore, we use lots and lots of plastic. And many of these are one-time plastics. We generate so much plastic, it's scary.

However, acquiring this wealth and having these conveniences often comes at very expensive environmental costs. With all the energy demands, the earth's temperature is increasing and we are now starting to experience the consequences of climate change. These environmental impacts often affect some communities more than others such as the poor, minority communities, countries with many other problems already.

I think most of us are concerned about the environment. We want to do something, but, unfortunately, so often we don't know what to do. I think there are many thoughts that creep into our minds about why NOT to start and I think many of these will sound familiar. It is too difficult; my contribution is not going to make a difference anyway. It is not my fault, it is somebody else's fault or problem. It is easy to play the blame game: Blame industry, blame the politicians, blame specific companies, blame my neighbor, blame other countries, blame the rich, blame the poor, blame the other political party, blame, blame blame. Probably some of these excuses have some merit, but....

I believe we as Christians are called to act to take care of God creation. We cannot be just bystanders watching from the outside. Just like it will be difficult to completely solve poverty, homelessness and food insecurity, we and our congregation have not given up on it. We are trying. Even though we cannot provide food for everybody, we do help out at *Love Thy Neighbor* and IHN and make a difference in some capacity in a few people's lives. In the same way I also believe our actions can make an environmental difference (more about this a bit later). One of the most difficult things (as we all know) is to start. I think there are possibilities on many fronts and I am going to mention a few here.

First of all, educate yourself. There is so much good information out there – news articles and reports, podcasts, videos and more. Just a slight warning – just like everything else, there is also misinformation so be a little careful (If in doubt, check with their funding source and their agenda). If 50 experts say some action or inaction is detrimental to the environment and one says it is not – most likely the 50 experts are correct and not the one person (especially if this person is on Facebook!). Some of the environmental issues are complicated and there is not always a clear yes/no answer.

Start doing things and/or stop doing things. You do not necessarily have to sell your house and car tomorrow and move into a tent and get a bicycle. It might be a bad move in Michigan because winter is coming! Instead start doing the little and relatively easy things – once you start then progress (hopefully quickly) to the more challenging things.

Here are a few examples. Many of these you might have heard before and already be doing them. Turn your heat down in winter by a couple of degrees (yes, it is fine to wear a fleece and warmer clothes in the winter inside) and turn your air conditioning temperatures up in the summer. Replace all your lightbulbs with LEDs. Walk, cycle or take public transport and leave the car at home more often. Do resale shopping including getting some cloth bags for your next grocery run. Keep your computer, cellphone, and other electronics a year to two longer before

getting the next one. It saves on electronic waste which is a big problem. Eat lower on the food chain (plant-based proteins; less beef) a couple days more a week.

Let your wallet speak. Support shops, industries, and products that are more environmentally responsible. I talked about recycle shops, but also bulk foods, products that use less plastics, treat animals more humanely, use phosphate free fertilizer and cut down on the pesticides. Our lawns do not have to look like exclusive country club golf courses.

Buy local to cut down on transportation costs. Remember the car companies are not going to keep on making large vehicles if we only buy small cars. Support groups and not-for-profits that are fighting for causes you believe in.

Be an advocate and vote for the person who supports environmental causes (although I am not propagating one issue voting!). Speak out, talk to your family friends and colleagues. However, remember we as Christians are called to love our neighbor and not to insult or shout at people or to get in a heated argument with people (even if we think they are completely wrong, irrational or just stubborn).

I think the best thing we can do is inspire other people by our own actions. As families, of course, we need some consensus and middle ground if everybody is not on the same page. Contact your representative (often) and tell your likeminded friends to do the same. The Covid pandemic has taught us that if the majority of the people believe in something, and we have our political leaders on board, we can change very quickly and very radically. The challenge for us is to convince enough people and people in power, that our existing way of life is not sustainable, and we have to change.

We are starting an environmental group at our church with the goal of informing and inspiring each other to do the right thing. This group might also reach out to the larger Ann Arbor community and be part of a bigger local effort. – stay tuned.

Why do I believe there is hope? First of all, we as Christians are called to be the hope in the world and we have to have faith in God that He will be with us as we try to do the right thing, as we go beyond our comfort zone and make some sacrifices.

From a practical side, technology has evolved in the past ten years. Renewable energy options are becoming more viable and electric cars are more abundant and practical. Locally, Ann Arbor is putting in more and more bike lanes. It is much easier to eat less beef and lower on the food chain. I think there is an environmental awakening especially in the younger generations and we, as Christians, need to be part of the solution.

Remember, our planet is pretty resilient, and can endure some environmental pollution. Thus we do not have to live a pollution free life - just a lifestyle that our planet can sustain. From personal experience I can say trying to live a more sustainable life can also be fun and a great challenge.

Until the pandemic I was biking and running to work, and I really enjoyed it. I saw people and places in Ann Arbor that I have never seen before. We compost our kitchen waste and it is amazing and very interesting how the whole process works and when I use it for our

vegetable garden, I feel pretty good. I hope you can also have fun and make it a meaningful challenge for you and your family.

As we conclude this sermons series, my hope for all of us is that we will not say “Yes I plan to do this” or “Yes we should do something”, or “I will start next year”; but instead that we will start with real action tomorrow or very soon. I hope we all will mindfully think what our responsibilities are, positively inspire each other and to ask God’s help and guidance as we try to do the right but rather difficult thing.