

## **“It’s Not Easy Being Green”**

First United Methodist Church Pasadena

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“Going Green” is the latest trend in everything from the food we eat to the places we live to the transportation that we take to the products we use...but in reality, this is nothing NEW. Taken from the Babylonian Talmud<sup>1</sup>, the collection of ancient rabbinic writings on Jewish law and tradition (in the second or third century), hear the tale of the wise elder:

*While the sage, Honi, was walking along a road, he saw a man planting a carob tree. Honi asked him, “How long will it take for this tree to bear fruit?”*

*“Seventy years,” replied the man.*

*Honi then asked, “Are you so healthy a man that you expect to live that length of time and eat its fruit?”*

*The man answered, “I found a fruitful world because my ancestors planted it for me. Likewise I am planting for my children.”*

This Wednesday, we celebrate the 39<sup>th</sup> year of an official Earth Day, but today, as we “Celebrate the Festival of God’s Creation,” it’s more about celebrating Earth Day EVERY DAY and going back to a simpler way of living...but with an awareness and commitment to discovering new ways to incorporate God’s Creation into our homes, churches, and communities.

Let us think on these things. Let us pray:

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<sup>1</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Taanit 23a* (second or third century); The Green Bible, NRSV, San Francisco: Harper One, 1989.

Let the words of my mouth...and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in thy sight,  
Our God, Our Rock, and Our Redeemer. Amen.

Now some of you may already do this, but placate me. Let's do some imagining. Imagine waking up at 4:30 in the morning. You rise, you get ready and thank God for the day ahead of you. You eat your breakfast. You get ready for work. Now here's where your story may differ, you tie your boots, and put on your wide-brimmed hat, and are ready to go out to the hand-tilled land which you have maintained and sustained an organic community farm for you and your neighbors in the low-income food desert (surrounded by liquor stores, fast food, and no grocery stores) of South Central L.A. You arrive at the 14-acres of land you have cultivated to find that it has been completely razed and leveled by a bulldozer. There are no more organic vegetables, there are no more fresh fruits from the trees, no more livelihood for the 350 families who tilled the earth. You have been evicted from your land that you has served your community for the last 14 years. Is there any hope? Do you doubt that you will survive this tragedy?

In the earlier part of the story of John 20 we come to the place of *The Empty Tomb*. If we read the Gospel text in its full context, we already know that Mary panicked at the sight of the empty tomb and called for the Disciples. They may not yet have understood the Resurrection, but they believed. Jesus then appeared to Mary to ask her to stop crying for she was the one chosen to tell the other Disciples that he was returning to his Father and to hers, "to my and your God." So as Mary rejoiced with the news, "I have seen the Lord!" as Youth Green Team Coordinator, Nicole Lussier read John 20:19-31, Jesus also returned to the Disciples, stood among them and said, "Peace be with you," and showed

him his hands and his sides. Yes, it was truly Jesus. They had seen the Lord! Ok, but there was a doubter in the crowd. Thomas, the Twin—where was he when Jesus visited? Wherever he was, he missed Jesus and was quite adamant and quite doubtful about this “reappearance” of their Savior. “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

As we Celebrate the Festival of God’s Creation, we are reminded that we are to rejoice in all that we have received, be it in the blessings and in the beauty of God that surrounds us. With constant reminders such as this week’s EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) finding that declared that carbon dioxide and five other greenhouse gases sent off by cars and many industrial plants "endanger public health and welfare," or Davis Guggenheim and former U.S. Vice-President Al Gore’s 2006 Oscar winning documentary film about global warming, *An Inconvenient Truth*,<sup>2</sup> we are surrounded by GREEN advocacy to take action NOW. Yet, there are still non-believers. Folks who think that the earth will take care of itself. The scientists are just making up non-sense. That they will not live to see these effects come to fruition, so why bother...yet, these are our own human productions that are destroying God’s creation? We should bother. We should bother to take note and care.

Why should we care? Let’s break it down. Our own United Methodist Social Principles holds us accountable to the Natural World<sup>3</sup>. That “*All creation is the Lord’s, and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it. Water, air, soil, minerals, energy*

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<sup>2</sup> *An Inconvenient Truth*, film documentary directed by Davis Guggenheim and presented by Al Gore, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> United Methodist Church Book of Discipline 2008, *Social Principles: I. The Natural World*, ¶160, Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2008, p. 98-101.

*resources, plants, animal life, and space are to be valued and conserved because they are God's creation and not solely because they are useful to human beings.” As our Social Principles talk about our responsibilities economically, politically, socially, and technologically, it's really about the Stewardship of God's World. The word ecology origins come from the Greek oikos (or eco) meaning household, nomos or (nomy), translating to rule, and logos or (logy) relating to reasoning. Therefore we are all called to be stewards of God's household. “The Christian tradition teaches that the land belongs to God, and we are called to care for it. To do so, our economies must reflect our understanding of the rules of nature revealed through our knowledge of ecology. Healthy stewardship integrates knowledge of the natural world with economic and social systems that ensure the long-term sustainability of the whole of Creation, including the people within it.”<sup>4</sup>*

So what does it mean to go green? “Going Green,” a phrase now widely used to describe lifestyles designed and constructed with minimal negative impact to the environment and with an emphasis on conservation of resources, energy efficiency, and healthful interior spaces, is about being a good steward. Let's take this Bible for example. A regular NRSV, Bible, or so you think! I checked this Bible out with Ruth MacPherson from our Church Library. Printed with soy-based ink on recycled paper and adapted from the “red-letter editions” of Bibles that have Jesus' direct statements printed in red, the “green-letter edition” has been adapted to highlight the rich and varied ways the books of the Bible speak directly to how we should think and act as we confront the environmental

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<sup>4</sup> National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program, *Celebrating and Caring for God's Creation*, Washington D.C., 2009..

crisis facing our planet. *{And with essays from eco-theological scholars, Bible studies, and with poignant thoughts about “where do we go from here?” we can also read the Bible in how God’s entire creation is what we are called to care for.}* Even this morning’s text, the Psalm 133 was the *Blessedness of Unity* in which we envision *the dew of Hermon which falls on the mountains of Zion as God’s ordained blessing for life evermore*. And the Gospel text is highlighted here in GREEN as Jesus came amongst his Disciples with the message of “*Peace be with you,*” (20:19) and a week later when Thomas was with them, Jesus says again (20:26, “*Peace be with you.*”) This is the message that Jesus gives to us, and that is given for all of God’s Creation. Peace...to be with you. *(To be with all.)*

And how are we creating that “Green Peace” here and now? What are we doing at First UMC Pasadena that is Going Green? What are we doing here? Well, for starters, I know that some of you carpool to church. That’s Going Green. Our Evangelism and Hospitality committee not only uses real dishes and silverware for Friends and Family lunches and our coffee cups are recyclable and the coffee is Fair Trade...not to mention our Visitors gifts are beautiful ceramic coffee cups that can be used again and again (did you hear that visitors? Cool, a free mug!). Going Green! Our Library Committee is not only the host of many Green Resources such as this Bible, but is Going Green with its information on ecology, many earth and child-friendly books, and great bulletin boards in the halls that will help us with greening-tips! And of course I have to mention our Youth! One of Boy Scouts from Troop 27 has decided that for his Eagle Scout project, he would like to change all of overhead fluorescent lights in the church to CFLs –or Compact Fluorescent

Light bulbs which are more energy efficient. And our Youth group is moving and shaking with their newly formed GREEN TEAM! Bringing more awareness to the church about Greening the church, the Sue Clairday's Sunday School class planted some flowers this morning and reminded me that we need to good with intentionality and to share that goodness with others. The Youth Green Team also has a campaign in the works for recyclable shopping bags to be distributed to our church members. And just yesterday, a group of six very dedicated and three very committed adult Counselors left First UMC Pasadena at 6am for Tezozomoc Farm in Bakersfield to learn about environmental and ecological justice, to do a little farming, and to see how we can participate in helping to support the farm.

You see, after the farmers of the South Central L.A. Community Supported Agriculture farm were evicted from their land, a farmer named Tezozomoc (who is also a full-time Engineer by day-job) organized the farmers and returned to the land and re-cultivated 80 acres of land share-cropping with another farmer in Bakersfield. Though some may have doubted that they would continue their work as farmers, those who were fighting for economic, environmental, and ecological justice, persevered and continue to grow the farm. Their completely organic and pesticide free farm hopes to expand to another 80 acres by next year, but they need more help. But more awareness of their story needs to be told. While the nine of us heard the history of their farm in South Central L.A. and that it was created out of a need for fresh produce because of the lack of grocery stores in the area and the that residents of the community were not making living-wages, we also learned how this group of farm workers consistently works to raise a farm solely organic

to ensure that not only the produce is fresh, but that they are returning the earth to its natural conditions without allowing toxic pesticides to seep into the ground or onto what we eat. This year, the documentary film, “The Garden,” telling the story about the farmers and Community Supported Agriculture was nominated for an Oscar. You can even find listings for a showing at the Newark(?) this upcoming weekend!

So on that long car ride back, we thought about ways we could support the Community Farm and ways we can encourage all of the congregation to become more Green-Conscious! This summer, we hope to work in conjunction with the Missions, Peace and Justice Committee to be a monthly distributor of farm produce boxes. [Show produce box]

The Green Team also challenges the church to see what are you doing this Earth Day? What can you do for your part to support God’s Creation? Recycling is easy--separate your cans, glass, plastics, and newspapers (if you still read those things, as opposed to online?—which is actually Going Green!). Or try something simple, like: turning off lights if you’re not in the room, hang drying your clothes for a change, use a recyclable shopping bag, or ride your bike, take public transportation, or find a carpool to work or church! (Let’s look to our own Bishop Mary Ann Swenson as one who follows in the way of a Green-Christ who is erasing her carbon footprint by only bicycling or catching the bus to work—she doesn’t even drive!)

Or start with what you eat. Try buying and eating organic foods that are pesticide or cage-free. After all, Jesus ate all-natural and always emphasized food with faith (a reminder of Feeding the 5000 or Communion, anyone?) But it is true, as we gather around the table we are reminded of the food we eat and the many hands who got the food onto our table.

One of the words that farmers and ecologists use is the word “Regeneration.” From a Green perspective, regeneration is the renewal of sites or habitats that have become unfit for human, animal, or plant habitation, and bring them back into productive use. This is also a theological term. A word that reminds us that in Christ’s resurrection, we are born anew, that we are all granted a new start. A seed of hope.

Be Doubting Thomases no more. Sometimes it may not look that easy, but it’s not hard either! Do not doubt, but believe! And as Jesus said to Thomas, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe,” And we are the blessed ones. We have seen God’s glory, truly revealed through the beauty, power, abundance, and mystery of the world. In the supernatural and in the natural, we are reassured that God is continually present and active in the world.

*{On this Sunday and on everyday, be reminded that it is OUR responsibility to be keepers of God’s Creation and the beauty of our world. It is entrusted in our care that we love one another and the world around us. We believe so that God’s kin-dom of Creation can reign here and now and that through believing we may have life in his name (20:31). It is so written.} Amen and Amen.*

**Benediction:**

*Green People of First Pasadena, You are sent forth into God's wondrous and beautiful Creation.*

*Green People of First Pasadena, You are sent to follow in the ways of the Green-Christ sent forth to do goodness and justice for your neighbor.*

*Green People of First Pasadena, You are sent to share the PEACE of Christ with all who bike or carpool in your path! Amen and Amen!*