



# First Christian Church of Orange (Disciples of Christ)

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**SERMON:** "It Was Good" – Creation Care Series Part 1 – Water

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 1:1-8

**By Pastor Dayna Kinkade**

*In the beginning when God created<sup>a</sup> the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup> the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God<sup>b</sup> swept over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup> Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. <sup>4</sup> And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup> God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*

*<sup>6</sup> And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." <sup>7</sup> So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. <sup>8</sup> God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.*

I am a closeted environmentalist. Everything I know – everything I should be doing – everything I should not be doing – along with every horrible statistic and story is crammed into a closet and the door is shut. Every now and then I return to that door with guilt-laced resolve saying, "This is it!" "It's time to change!" is my battle cry as I reach for the handle. But first I must pause to consider a shaming thought – "The time to change was years ago. Isn't that how the old proverb goes? The best time to plant a tree is sixty years ago." My assertive voice interrupts "But you have to start at some point – just do it! Now!"

As I turn the knob I can feel the pressure on the other side of the door like the weight of the world is pressing upon it. (Indeed, it is!) And then I remember all over again why I haven't been in a hurry to open it. The second I pop that latch an avalanche of stuff is going to pin me against the wall and paralyze me. I can already see it. It will be an avalanche of guilt producing, time consuming, checkbook reducing information and admonitions that says, "change or die." Whales tangled in fishing traps, birds full of plastic, seafood full of mercury, deformed toads, dying bees. Yesterday in Long Beach, divers collected fifty pounds of plastic on a small stretch of beach – most of it straws. On and on it goes. Death should be a good motivator, but I'm feeling pretty good today so it's not. For now, I'm just going to put the weight of my body against it, force it shut, and put off the inevitable one more day. Maybe tomorrow...

Can anyone relate? I don't know about you but I set the recycle bin near my closet overwhelming facts and statistics. It is my guilt reduction strategy. I see that tub filled with my plastic bottles, weekly ads, and the

ream of paper I didn't need to print, and I feel a little better. "I'm not a bad person – look! I recycle!" Heck, I even drive a Prius.

Across the hall is another closet even worse than the first. It is filled with my dirty little secrets. I know what's in there...I just can't bear to think about cleaning it out. God help me if anyone knew....wait...maybe it would help me if someone knew. I'm among friends here, right? I drove fourteen miles one way to save \$2 on something I just had to have. I bought fifty plastic cups when my family came to visit. I bought disposable diapers for my grandson. (dropping head) I'm so ashamed. I can't seem to remember my reusable grocery bags and continue to buy plastic ones. I don't keep a bucket in my shower. There are so many more.

Behind door number 1 are the gloom and doom statistics and the groans of creation. Behind door number 2 is my reality. As long as those things are behind doors I don't have to deal with them.

A number of years ago my husband and I decided to take in a matinee on our day off. We selected what we thought was going to be a light-hearted comedy starring the Saturday Night Live star, Molly Shannon. The name of the movie was, "The Year of the Dog." The trailer for the movie made it look like it was going to be a laugh riot; a car packed full of rescue dogs with their heads sticking out all the windows of Molly Shannon's car...funny stuff. We wrongly assumed that a light-hearted comedy might include more than one funny scene but this one did not.

Distraught by the death of her dog, Pencil, Molly Shannon's character ends up at the dog shelter where she sees all the dogs on death row. After gazing into their pleading eyes she is horrified by the thought of their deaths and she takes them all home. Immediately things spin out of control. Her house is destroyed by all these dogs and they take over her life. She becomes obsessed with learning all she can about animal abuse, factory farms, and animal rights activism. She becomes so overwhelmed by the statistics and information and the need that she ceases to be able to function. She is depressed and despondent by the futility of her efforts.

Do you see? This is my fear? If I open either one of those doors, I am afraid I will become that person. I am afraid I will be so overwhelmed I won't be able to do anything but despair. And heaped upon my despair will be shame; the shame of my own reckless abuse and neglect of creation.

It seems like every environmental workshop I go to about a faith response to our groaning world begins with a dump truck full of statistics and ranting lobbyists telling us light bulbs are not going to turn climate change around. I was speaking to a pastor who was coordinating a workshop for church folk who want to become "green." She proposed allocating the first three hours of the workshop to defining the problem. I could already hear the beeps of that dump truck starting to back up. All I could think about was Molly Shannon and that car full of dogs, only it wasn't funny.

Unless you live in a cave you know our environmental issues are not going away – and they are considerable. The lifestyle to which we have become accustomed is not sustainable should everyone choose to live the way we do – and that is car driving, meat eating, over-consumers of packaged and processed products. That island of diapers the size of Texas is not going away. Unless we change, animals of the sea will continue to have their guts filled with plastic and their coats slicked with oil. We water our lawns with drinkable water when there so many who have no safe water to drink. I don't think I need more facts and statistics – what I need is a way to begin that doesn't overwhelm me into paralysis and guilt me to defensiveness and denial.

Perhaps a good place to start is our beginning – with the story of creation. Over and over again we hear the joyful words, “It is good!” God is patting God'self on the back. “I do good work!” Each masterpiece is signed by the artist and anything that bears that signature is sacred.

If you had an undiscovered piece of art signed by Rembrandt your jaw would drop at the discovery of your good fortune and you would honor it with care and the reverence it deserves. And yet, we are surrounded by the masterpieces of our creator and have no reverence whatsoever.

Jesus concludes his great Sermon on the Mount with a prescription for anxiety; stop, look, and consider. Stop, look, and consider things like birds and lilies. It doesn't matter if we are appreciating an expansive landscape or a tiny microorganism – there is beauty, order, and mystery – and the signature of God.

Wendell Berry, (farmer, writer, activist, poet) is the author of this poem titled: “How to Be a Poet.”

i

Make a place to sit down.  
Sit down. Be quiet.  
You must depend upon  
affection, reading, knowledge,  
skill—more of each  
than you have—inspiration,  
work, growing older, patience,  
for patience joins time  
to eternity. Any readers  
who like your poems,  
doubt their judgment.

ii

Breathe with unconditional breath  
the unconditioned air.

Shun electric wire.  
Communicate slowly. Live  
a three-dimensioned life;  
stay away from screens.  
Stay away from anything  
that obscures the place it is in.  
There are no unsacred places;  
there are only sacred places  
and desecrated places.

iii

Accept what comes from silence.  
Make the best you can of it.  
Of the little words that come  
out of the silence, like prayers  
prayed back to the one who prays,  
make a poem that does not disturb  
the silence from which it came.

Source: Poetry (January 2001).

"There are no unsacred places; there are only sacred places and desecrated places." This is the perfect lens through which to consider creation. Some might call this silent wonder, mindfulness. I think of it as reverence – this act of stopping to look and consider. It turns out that these sacred places speak volumes about fragility, interconnectedness, balance and beauty.

For Berry, the opposite of this reverence for the sacred is desecration. We have desecrated that which God made sacred. We have been given a masterpiece and instead of respecting and revering it, we have tried to own it and we fight over who gets to use it and consume it. We have made ourselves the center of creation when in reality we are part of a delicate web of creation that we cannot escape.

So you might be wondering... "Is this the best she's got? Is she really telling us that the answer to impending doom is to stop and ponder rocks?" My answer to that question is both yes and no. Because I am talking about how to begin I do not presume to offer answers nor in any way diminish the efforts of others.

- We need activists and lobbyists to be in our face about the need for systemic change.
- We need education on the impact of our personal and collective choices.
- We need organized responses, and collective creativity and power.
- We need recycling and other responsible options.
- We need to conserve and preserve.
- We need to reduce, reuse, and refuse.

- Some things we simply need to stop doing and someone needs to help us understand what those things are.
- We need all of this – and we need people who are passionate, fanning the flames and banging the drums for change.

AND we also need those people, like me, who want to do something, maybe even everything, but don't know where to start without being buried in shame and statistics.

I'm simply suggesting that some of us need to begin in a different place; between the ears. How would our lives change if we really believed what Wendell Berry declares: "There are no unsacred places?" What if we simply began with a desire to revere rather than desecrate God's creation? What if we simply began by stopping, looking, and considering what is right in front of us?

There are some Christians who believe that Jesus is going to come back vengefully and take the faithful both dead and alive. Survivors will be air-lifted from this planet as it gasps its last breaths of life. There are some Christians who believe God gave all of this to us to use up. There are some Christians who believe their individual rights are more important than their responsibility to their neighbors. We are NOT those Christians.

All of creation is sacred. There are no unsacred places. This planet is ours to tend, not to end.

It is time to open those closets and do some spring cleaning. I don't have to deal with it all in one day but one day at a time. One plastic bottle at a time. One straw at a time.

What about you?