

“The Greatest Christian Responsibility of Our Time”

a sermon delivered by Nate Klug at North Guilford Congregational Church, 7/22/12

*Genesis 1:1-2:2*

*1 Corinthians 12:12-20*

1) Why did God create the world? (PAUSE). Why did God create the world?

Why did an animal like the *peacock* end up existing -- with its bright extravagant feathers decorated with what looks like hundreds of blue-green eyes?

Or what about the emperor tamarin monkey, with its long white mustache hanging down below its shoulders?

Or the shaggy komondor dog? Or the leafy seadragon?

Why do new flowers sprout and grow by the walkway and under our flagpole every spring? Why do trees in Connecticut turn orange and red every October?

Why does God create the world, and everything in it -- including ourselves?

2) Well, I think that crazy tail on the peacock gives us one *clue*. Scientists know that the colors and shape of that tail are related to the male peacock being able to attract his mate.

But scientists also say that this wildly complex tail, with its different stems and barbs, goes way *beyond* what is needed to *attract* a peahen. In other words, the peacock's tail is unnecessarily beautiful.

It is magnificent-- just for the sake of being magnificent.

And if we can wrap our minds around that possibility, that something would exist just for the sake of being magnificent, we will go a long way towards appreciating what God is up to, in the Creation story of Genesis.

For this is a story about *why God creates*.

And as theologians like to remind us, God was perfectly OK on his own. God was already perfect, and generous, and totally good at being God: *God didn't need us!*

But, from our perspective, life *starts* when God's generosity overflows itself. See, God is so magnificent that God wants to share, *just for the sake of sharing*.

And Genesis tells us that Creation starts by God saying *Yes*. Yes, over and over again. Yes to light and morning, and Yes to darkness and evening.

Yes to the Sky. Yes to an Earth. Yes to the Seas.

Yes to plants, and fruit trees. Yes to seasons of the year, and Yes to stars.

Yes to creatures: birds and cattle and sea monsters! And, after a quite a while, Yes to Human Beings.

And then, at the end of what Genesis calls the sixth day, God looks out. She looks out over it all, and she sees *everything* she has created. And indeed it is very good.

You could even say it is magnificent-- just for the sake of being magnificent.

3) And like a great painting that pulls your eye back and forth, or like a great symphony that echoes itself in every movement, God's Creation is magnificent *because everything in it is related.*

Everything in God's Creation is *related.*

Did you notice that in Genesis, when God makes one thing, something else is always affected? *Light* is created to relate to the darkness. *Sky* is created to relate to water. *Seas* are created to relate to *land.*

And *on* the earth, trees are related to fruit. Fruit is related to its seeds. And seeds are related to birds, which pick up the seeds and scatter them, as they fly across that *sky*, maybe looking for a fish in the water!

These different things that God creates, all of them *relate* to each other. All of them, in one way or another, *depend* on each other.

And did you notice where human beings come, in this great list? After God's created hundreds of other creatures, after animals develop on land, then *we* come along.

This order suggests that we couldn't *be* -- we couldn't exist -- if it weren't for everything that comes before us: the wind and the stars and the waters and plants and the animals. (And it's still true of course: if it wasn't for the little insects that pollinate plants, human beings wouldn't have a diet to survive on.)

4) But of course, everything *else* depends on *what we do*, too. As Genesis says, God gives human beings "dominion."

So the earth, the sea, the plants and other creatures: it all relies on what we do as well. This inter-relatedness, this inter-dependence -- is what makes God's Creation so *magnificent!*

Everything *relates* to something else. Every *part* supports another *part.*

And it's no accident, I think, that this principle of inter-dependence got picked up by Christianity, by the early followers of Jesus Christ, almost *right away!*

Only twenty years after *Jesus* died, Paul wrote that letter to the Corinthians. In which he argued that a *true* church is like a body; every part relates to another part!

A true church of Jesus Christ is a *body* made up of all our different, but interconnected, gifts. We each bring something different.

*Indeed*, as Paul says in his funny way, *if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I don't belong" that would not make it any less a part of the body.*

*And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong," that would not make it any less a part of the body.*

Each part contributes something different. *And every part affects every other part.*

Here in church today, I couldn't be preaching if you weren't also *participating*, giving me signs, nodding or looking thoughtful or closing your eyes!

And the times when we are *silent* together in prayer -- that silence wouldn't sound the same if Bonnie-Jean and Dave hadn't shared *music* with us.

And our prayer of *invocation*, it wouldn't feel the same if we didn't have young baby Jacob in our presence most Sundays this summer!

And our famous church fair: it literally would not happen if all the different parts of this body didn't roll up their sleeves and pitch in in some way!

As church people, you get it, I think. You understand this great, cosmic principle of *interdependence*. You *appreciate* how everything relates to something else.

You sit on committees because you know that worship and Sunday school and mission work wouldn't happen without them. You make an extra phone call to check in, because you know that *every part of this body* matters.

5) Everything and everyone is connected. A good church gets that.

So we should also get it, then; I think we of all people should get it, when we hear fact after fact, when we see picture after picture, about *what is happening to God's creation*.

When we see the pictures of glaciers melting in the Arctic. Or pictures of the wildfires in Colorado and New Mexico. When we read about the heat wave in the Great Plains and Midwest, that's killed 23 people in St. Louis alone.

We of all people should get it, when we hear about the bigger picture of global warming. Like the fact that this past June broke or tied *three thousand* temperature records across the US. And the fact that the month before that was the hottest May on record in the Northern Hemisphere.

And here's the most difficult fact, of all. For me to hear least:

That we are causing and contributing to this change in our world. You and I are causing the earth to get hotter. The greenhouse gases we produce, mainly by using gas in our cars and airplanes, and by using electricity, they are making the earth hotter. *And hotter. And hotter.*

6) In Genesis, God tells men and women, *Fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over other creatures.*

And indeed we have evolved to a point where we have tremendous power over the rest of the earth. As humans we have come to hold tremendous *dominion*.

In the last six generations of human existence, we have drilled, and discovered, and burned up more than half the oil and gas reserves on our earth. Those reserves took *millions* of years to form. And it's taken us about 150 years to go through half of them.

When God gave human beings such power, such dominion over earth, this can't be the situation he had in mind. This can't be the kind of power he had in mind.

For God of course is our ultimate power. And if we go by Genesis 1, we know God chooses to use his power in a very *different* way. God uses power to create something out of nothing. God uses power to create something *magnificent*, just for the sake of it being magnificent.

7) And here's the good news. If there is good news today, it's here.

Despite the situation we are in, Genesis still reminds us that we are creatures made in the image of God. We are people made in that divine image, that creative image, that image of saying Yes to creation.

Which means we have the chance to use our dominion to *preserve* this earth. We have the chance to say Yes to protecting the earth.

We have the power to start to change our attitude about the earth's natural resources. We have the power to thinking about what happens when we throw something away. We have the power to recognize that steadily melting ice in Greenland, and the drought we heard about in Kansas, and the very hot summer we've had here in Connecticut -- it is all related. *And it is part of an urgent problem.*

8) The Rev. Jim Antal is the UCC conference minister up in Massachusetts. And Jim reminds us that changing our attitude about the environment goes all the way back to Jesus' most basic teaching.

“Love the Lord your God, and *love your neighbor as yourself.*”

These days, in this world especially, our neighbor is not just the person next door to us. As God’s creation keeps getting hotter, our neighbors are Hannah and Abbey, who are growing up into this changing climate.

Our neighbors are Cameron, and Lauren, and Zach. Our neighbors are Melanie, and Jackson, and little Jacob. Our neighbors are your grand-children, and the great-children who aren’t born yet, so who will have no say over what *God’s Creation will be like in 50 years.*

9) I want to end by asking us, this interconnected body of Christ, to take a minute and think about God’s interconnected Creation. Take a minute in silence and think about one part of God’s creation that you love.

It could be this church on the hill, it could be the Guilford shoreline, it could be a spot in the woods. Think about one part of Creation that is magnificent, just for the sake of being magnificent.

And then ask yourself: what one thing can I do to make sure that future generations get to experience this? *What one thing can I change, in my household, in my commute to work, in my church, what one thing can I change that will help to honor and preserve God’s creation?*

So that future generations can love the earth you have loved -- and the God who makes all of this! Amen.