

“Re-Creation”

June 17, 2018
Genesis Chapter 1 (The Message)

Rev. Kimberly Heath
Wall Street United Church

I would like to start by leading you on a mini-mini meditation exercise.

I want you to close your eyes. Put your feet on the floor, roll your shoulders and take a deep breath. Breathe in and out, being aware of your breathing. Now in a time of silence, I want you to imagine that Jesus wants to meet with you somewhere. If you could meet anywhere in the world, where would you meet? I encourage you to invite the Holy Spirit to show you the right place. Maybe it's a place that is special to you, a place that is perhaps peaceful and beautiful. Maybe you've been to this place before and maybe you haven't. Let's just take a moment in silence to let this place come to mind ...

Keeping your eyes closed, I want you to look around that place. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? Why is it that you and the Lord have chosen this particular place? Listen for a moment and see if you get an answer or a hint as to why this place...

Ask and listen for what God has to say to you in that special place. Now give thanks for this place and gently open your eyes and return to where we are now.

I would encourage you to at some point go back to that special place and spend more time there.

Was your place outside, or somehow connected to nature? Now it could be that if we did this exercise in mid-January or even mid-April this year, you might have a different result. And for some people, it is an indoor place, like here at the church or in a church of your childhood, and for others just a special and safe place in the house. There is no right or wrong answer — wherever you went in your mind's eye is a special place and I encourage you to remember this place — and even imagine going there when you go into a time of prayer.

I have done a longer version of this exercise several times with a group. What I find interesting is that, when we go around the table after and share, the vast majority of people describe a meeting place that is somewhere outside and or connected with nature.

Though not officially summer yet, we are in the in the fullness of that summer season with long days and warm or hot weather. It's also Father's Day, and while it's a bit stereotypical, often dads choose to take this special

day or weekend to camp or go fishing or boating or some kind of outdoor recreation. This is the time of year when we just love to get outside, and we are just so blessed to live in such a beautiful place. I can't get over how beautiful this area is!

Occasionally I shake my head and compare what I get living here to what those in Toronto have for WAY more money, and I just can't quite believe we have it so good! I'm so grateful to be here in Brockville — it's a wonderful place to live.

I don't think it's a coincidence that so many find a close connection to God outdoors. Whether walking, biking, hiking or canoeing, I have always found it to be a place where I can talk to God and where somehow the reception and the signal strength to God is higher than when I'm rushing around town picking up this kid, or in a meeting, or in front of my computer. Why is that connection so good? Well, I suspect that part of it goes back to our evolution. For so much of the history of humanity, our connection to the natural world has been very, very closely tied. It is only so very recently that you can live in a city and work and travel and play without really being in nature at all. I also think that it has to do with the fact that we were created by God, and that we know so clearly that we did not create the world around us — that it is mysterious and incredible. We have a sense of awe being outside.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." With this simple, but profound, affirmation of faith, the Bible begins.

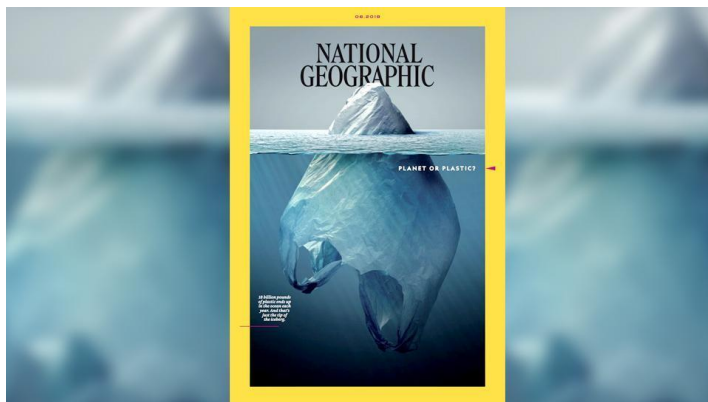
Throughout the scriptures, this affirmation of creation is repeated and restated. Isaiah 40:28 says, *"Do you not know, have you not heard, The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth?"* Acts 4:15 states: *"Turn from worthless things to the living God who made the heavens and the earth"*. The God we worship is not just any God, but *the* one and only who created the heavens and the earth.

One of the dangers of the 'Creation Story' is that we have tended to focus on the 6th day of the story of creation — when people were created. Humanity has a special place in creation, being made in the image of God. However, the Bible makes it very clear that we are only one part of creation. Jesus says in Matthew 10:29: *"Aren't two sparrows sold for only a penny? But your Father knows when any one of them falls to the ground."* Psalm 24:1 *"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it."* As Christians, we believe that the earth belongs to God, not to humans. As Christians, we need to hear these scriptures not just as a fact or as a thought, but as a warning. When we mistreat the earth, we are not just offending and

threatening a particular species or even our very survival in this fragile ecosystem, we are committing an offence against the Creator.

As a Christian, caring for the environment can't just be at the whim of whatever political beliefs you hold. It is nothing less than a command from God, and we will be held accountable for our care of the earth and God's creation.

World Environment Day is a United Nations day that is commemorated annually at the beginning of June. The theme for this year's day is "Beat Plastic Pollution". National Geographic's June edition features this massive issue.



Do you know that 9 million tons of plastic end up in the oceans every year? Picture 2 or 3 million elephants-sized amount of plastic going into the ocean every year.

Did you know that the average 'working life' of a plastic bag is 15 minutes, but that its lifespan is estimated to

be between 450 years and eternity before it fully biodegrades? We use a plastic bag for about 15 minutes — but it stays in the environment for between 450 years and so far beyond we can't calculate it. National Geographic is, of course, American, so they use a very American illustration, but I think it's a good one: "If plastic had been invented when the Pilgrims sailed from Plymouth England, to North America—and the Mayflower had been stocked with bottled water and plastic-wrapped snacks—their plastic trash would likely still be around, four centuries later."

Thank God that plastic wasn't invented until the late 19th century, and that production didn't really begin in earnest until the 1950's. I grew up with



plastic. I don't ever remember going to a grocery store where there wasn't plastic, but did you know that half of the plastic ever manufactured was made in the last 15 years? You don't need to be a marine biologist to know this is having a massive effect on creatures living in the oceans and on us too. Do you remember the story earlier this month of the sick pilot

whale who threw up 5 plastic bags? He later died and they discovered 80 plastic bags inside him. As National Geographic so succinctly puts it: "Plastic. Animals eat it, get stuck in it and die from it."



But it's not just the plastic we can see, but also the plastic we can't see. Plastic does break down into tiny micro-grains but it remains incredibly toxic to everything that eats these small bits of plastic. Do you know that on some beaches on the coast of the Big Island of Hawaii, as much as 15% of the sand is actually grains of microplastic? Plastics haven't been around long

enough for scientists to know how this is will affect humans, but it's clear that microplastics and nanoplastics will end up in our tissues and cells. And that's not good.

I could go on and on with shocking statistics. I encourage you to look up this National Geographic issue, or just read more about it. I don't share this with you to make you feel guilty, but to help wake us all up to our plastic addiction. Awareness is the first step. I know I am part of the problem. I do have cloth bags, but I often forget them in the car and am too lazy to go back and get them. I love those large freezer size zip-lock bags. By far the worst culprits are those single-use plastics: plastic bags, plastic straws and stir sticks, and plastic bottles.

The solutions are partly simple and partly complex. There is no question that to have a major impact, governments will need to be involved, and it's sad that little to nothing seems to have come out of that G7 meeting where this was one of the topics on the discussion table. But cities like Malibu, Miami Beach and Seattle have banned plastic straws. Many more cities have banned single-use plastic bags. We should continue to encourage our governments to make changes.

As much as possible we need to give up those single-use plastics: bags, straws, plastic Q-tips, and bottles, and try to avoid the plastic packaging in stores. We must recycle everything we can and not litter, and pick up the garbage we see near the shore so that it isn't blown into the river.

As Christians, we are called to be caretakers of the living world. It is one of the vows that those who joined the church made to “live with respect in creation”. We are not simply taxpayers with rights, we are citizens with responsibilities. We are citizens of this country and as Christians, we are citizens of the kingdom of God. We are called not to do it all, but to ask God, what can I do?

Christian theology does not believe that Creation was simply in the past. God did not just create; God is creating. That is one of the lines in our United Church Creed: “*We believe in God who has created and is creating*”. Some used to believe, perhaps some still do, that God was like the clock-maker who made the machine and then set it in motion and then left it to function on its own. That is not the Biblical belief. So many different worldviews, ancient and present, contain a sense of fate and futility: that life is an endless repetition of birth, growth, decay, suffering and death. Christians however believe that God is active in history. Christians believe that progress is possible because God is still creating.

I believe that as we confess our sin of using the living world instead of respecting it and caring for it; and as we surrender and give this world back to God, prayerfully bringing these big problems to God, that we will find solutions. God is a God of life and transformation. In the same way that we can bring our broken lives to God for healing and for transformation, we can also bring our broken world to God. As we walk hand and in hand with the Creator, amazing good can come. The Bible talks about God creating a new heaven *and* a new earth. We believe that this isn’t just future, it is happening and we are part of it. We are called to be co-creators with God to help in building a new world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Now I invite you to go back to that special place with God. Confess, listen in prayer for what one thing you can do to make a difference.