

A New Creation – 3. Facing Creation’s Brokenness

Romans 9:19-25

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Pastor Bethany Nelson

My grandparents, on my mom’s side were farmers. My grandpa farmed for over 70 years, growing up on same the land and in the same house he raised his own family - a two story, square farm house, surrounded by fields.

Here is a painting of it, as it looked in the early 90s and remains in my memory. Growing up, I spent a lot of time there as we were fortunate to live just a few miles away - from early on, the farm was a second home. And in high school, when my family and grandparents swapped homes, it became my primary home, too.

Now, a lot of my memories here include my Grandma. She was born in 1921 and like many of her generation, she embodies a spirit of frugality- an innate respect of resources. Growing up during the depression, she knows the importance to save and reuse resources, letting nothing go to waste. She’ll save half a hamburger patty by carefully wrapping it in a old cool whip container. Or she’ll follow behind us and scrape and save every last bit from a jar before washing. On the farm, she always kept a scrap pale under the sink. Usually it was old icecream bucket, in it, she’d put food scraps like potato peelings or egg shells. At the end of the day, she’d carry it out across the yard into the field, folding it gently into the dirt.

We didn’t call it composting then, and words like creation care were not part of our vocabulary. Instead, it was just the rhythm of daily life. Using what you could, saving what you had, and reusing what was left.

These last few weeks, we have been talking about Creation Care, learning how we give honor to God by acting with care for the earth God has made. But this is not a new idea. As we heard last week, God gave humanity a special responsibility at creation to tend, protect, and care for our earth.

Generations since, have found rhythms to life that protected resources given. Mending socks and patching pants. Or as my grandma showed us, saving food scraps to return to the earth and nourish the soil. I imagine most of us have similar memories to share from our childhood, of ways our elders taught us to care for our resources.

But we also know that we have not always been faithful to the command God gave to respect and love our earth. Overtime, we’ve become more careless than careful, and have caused great harm. Among the many gifts of technology and advances, is the gift of convenience. Yet, that convenience comes at a cost.

It’s estimated that in the US 38% of all food produced goes uneaten. And some estimate that as much as 60% of that wasted food could have been saved - by sharing with a neighbor, saving for another meal, or composting. When our food is wasted, we stretch our home budgets tighter, contribute to the 1 in 9 Minnesotans experiencing food insecurity, and contribute to the harmful release of pollution and gas.

Our habits and behaviors have had devastating impacts on our beautiful world. The consequences of which, are most acutely experienced by those most marginalized in the world,

including: children, the poor, and creation itself. As Romans 8 reminds us: “the whole creation is groaning together and suffering in labor pains.” The world is speaking. Are we listening?

I read a book this week by Larry Rasmussen, who is a renowned Christian environmental ethicist. In 2022 he published a book called, “The Planet you Inherit: Letters to my Grandchildren When Uncertainty’s a Sure Thing”. It’s a collection of 22 letters written to his young grandchildren.

The letters are part confession, part hope, and wholly a love story of between grandparent and grandchild, between one human and creation. In one of the opening letters he writes, *“Did you know that before your generation no humans of any stripe ever lived on a planet as hot as this one? Your life is climate instability, mass uncertainty, and breathtaking extinction. Tragedy crouches there, and I pray that somehow you wring adaptation from distress.*

A stone sits in my stomach because I know that [current] citizens continue [old] habits that doom their children... It turns out that Grandma, I, and our ancestors lived our whole lives by a single fatal premise. We assumed ‘that what was good for us would be good for the world,’ as Wendell Berry put it. We were wrong.”¹

We assumed what would be good for us would be good for the world. We were wrong. There are probably many scenarios to which this sentence could be aptly applied. When I hear it, I hear a reflection and confession filled with wisdom and with grief. A longing, only gained by age, to go back and do things differently.

And when we consider creation care and changes to our climate, there might be innumerable lessons we wish we had learned sooner. I only we could go back, and stop the ice caps from melting. If only we could stop the extinction of species around the world. If only we could go back and change, so that severe draught, catastrophic heat and weather patterns might not ever appear.

A stone sits in our collective stomachs, as we long for a world we once knew. As we long for a world some people never knew. But what do we do with this longing? How do we respond to these feelings of grief or guilt that grow within us?

Well, some of us might just freeze. And it’s no wonder we feel stuck. We’re facing enormous devastation, and told that part of the problem is the basic elements of our daily lives: what we drive, what we eat, how we heat our homes. It’s hard to know what to do, or where to start.

In fact, as researchers ask people around the world about climate change, one of the most common responses is what they call “solution aversion.” This speaks to the ways people do not act, because it feels overwhelming, difficult to understand, implement, or simply unfamiliar and new. People don’t have a problem with climate science, but they have a problem with climate solutions.

It’s common to feel an urgency to act, and an aversion to that action. When we don’t know what to do, or how to do it, we can feel stuck in one place. The good news, as people of faith, we help when we feel stuck, or guilt, or shame. God sees and hears us, and reminds us that faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains, so even our small actions can have big impact.

And, God calls us to new life, by offering forgiveness. You might remember, that even as Jesus hung upon the cross, taking his final breath, he spoke words of forgiveness. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He showed us how to bridge the divide between death and new life. And it began with forgiveness.

And so, as we encounter the harsh truths of the ways our human actions, and inaction, have caused immense suffering and harm: to one another, to every creature of this earth, and to creation itself - we might begin with confession. Praying to God and asking for God's forgiveness and renewal.

Sometimes, we seek forgiveness for personal faults: the things that I, myself, have done. And sometimes, we speak on behalf of the collective: the ways that we, as Christians, or Americans, or Humankind, have caused harm. And whether we pray on behalf of ourselves, or the collective, we promise to do better and change.

Now, it's a little unusual for us to stop and pray in the middle of a message, but I want to invite us to do just this. To confess the harm we have caused each other and creation, by praying a portion of the traditional prayer of confession across Christian communities, including the United Methodist Church, saying:

Merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and what we have left undone... For our sake, and the sake of your son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

Beloveds, people of God — hear this good news: as a called and ordained servant of God, I declare to you, in the name of Jesus Christ: Your sins have been forgiven, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Alright, what follows this gift of absolution? We try again. And this time, we try to live as God has commanded: loving God, loving one another, and loving God's created world. And when we do, we live into the full beauty of who God has created us to be.

Let's return to Romans 8, and hear how all of creation is waiting and hoping for us all to know the fullness of God's love. I'm going to read from: The First Nations Version: an Indigenous translation of the New Testament. This translation was created by First Nations people of North America to provide a way of using their traditional languages, and honor the oral tradition of their culture, while remaining faithful to New Testament authors.

I really love how this translation beautifully illustrates our relationship with creation. Listen now, as I read from Romans 8, I'm starting at verse 19:

The creation all around us is waiting on tiptoe for Creator's sons and daughters to be revealed in the full beauty of who Creator has created them to be. Creation itself became weak and powerless, unable to fulfill its destiny, not by its own choice but because of the one who had the power over it.

But there is hope, for Creator has a plan to restore human beings. Then all of creation will share in the freedom of the life of beauty and harmony given to all of Creator's children... This is what Creator was planning when he set us free by his Spirit. It is the hope of all creation.

Creation waits on tiptoe for humanity. Creation needs us to act and wants us to get this right. Creation is expectant and cheering us on with hope. Can you feel it? But creation is also teaching us. Right now, in Minnesota we are experiencing a vibrant spring. The grass which was brown throughout much of our snow-less winter, has turned bright green. Tulips are pushing through the ground. And the birds are singing a new song. Creation shows us what it means to move from death to new life, from stillness to dancing. The earth is hurting, as we heard, "creation is unable to fulfill its own destiny, not by its own choice, but because of the one who had power over it." But it has not stopped hoping or sharing signs of love with us. It reminds us in beautiful ways, how God makes all things new. This is our hope: the worst thing, is never the last thing. God's greatest work is in the creating and restoring of all creation. We are both recipients and partners in this work. So, returning to my original question: what do we do now that we have faced the reality of our changing world? How do navigate feelings of guilt, longing, or grief?

God invites us, not to freeze or escape, but to become even more invested in the gifts God has given. To lean in and do as Jesus taught. To act in love, trusting God will make all things new.

Last week, my boys learned about Earth Day at school. They came home with melodies stuck in their head, reminding them to "reduce, reuse, and recycle." Over dinner, we came up with ideas for reusing items around our home.

The boys said they could use old water bottles, with broken lids, as vases for flowers. One of them showed us how they had taken an old cylinder piggy bank, with a broken lid, and has refurbished it as a pencil holder. And they named how shopping at thrift stores and garage sales is a way they reuse items from other people, too. Plus, they said, it feels like a fun "treasure hunt".

I've been happy to learn school districts around the country are teaching more intentionally about climate change. But they are not only teaching in the classroom, but teaching by example. After learning that nearly 80% of school waste is recyclable or compostable, more than half of Hennepin County schools now participate in organics recycling program.

Close to home, Minnetonka Schools (of which some of our students attend), realized that after separating food waste and recyclables, 70% of their remaining cafeteria garbage was flatware, bowls, and wrappers. They moved to reusables, and have prevented 7,000 pounds of trash and will save over \$20,000 in just three years.

I loved learning about these practices. So what might you do? How might you love? Throughout this series, we've encouraged you to think of one thing you might do. Here are a few ideas: Track your food waste, and observe: Is your waste primarily from going bad before being cooked? Are you preparing too much food? Could you learn more about recycling? Track. Observe. Then make a plan: Maybe shop more frequently or look up your city's options for organics recycling. Volunteer at Second Harvest Heartland. Their work rescues food from landfills and shares it with those in need. They reduce food waste AND decrease food insecurity. Talk to others! Not only might you get ideas or inspiration, but when you talk to others about what you're doing, you'll realize you're not alone and see the bigger impact of your efforts. Lastly, don't despair. None of these ideas will stop climate change immediately or completely. But all of them make an impact. And, just as important, they honor God's command to care for

the earth and her resources. They are concrete examples of us following Christ's command to love one another, so that our children, our children's children, and all creation might know the power of hope and gift of new life.

As we close, I want to offer a blessing from the Chinook Indian Nation, which includes five tribes from what is now present day Oregon and Washington:

We call upon the earth, our planet home, with its beautiful depths and soaring heights, its vitality and abundance of life, and together we ask that it: Teach us, and show us the Way.
We call upon the mountains, the high green valleys and meadows filled with wild flowers, the snows that never melt, the summits of intense silence. We call upon the waters that rim the earth, horizon to horizon, that flow in our rivers and streams, that fall upon our gardens and fields. We call upon the land which grows our food, the nurturing soil, the fertile fields, the abundant gardens and orchards, and we ask that they: Teach us, and show us the Way.
We call upon the forests, the great trees reaching strongly to the sky with earth in their roots and the heavens in their branches, the fir and the pine and the cedar. We call upon the creatures of the fields and forests and the seas, the wolves and deer, the eagle and dove, the great whales and the dolphin, who share our home, and we ask them to: Teach us, and show us the Way.
We call upon all those who have lived on this earth, our ancestors and our friends, who dreamed the best for future generations, and upon whose lives our lives are built. And lastly, we call upon all that we hold most sacred, the presence and power of the Great Spirit of love and truth which flows through all the Universe, to be with us to: Teach us, and show us the Way.
Amen.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of April 28, 2024

Weekly Prayer

Holy God, you bring hope for all of creation. I praise you for making all things new. Hear the cries of my heart and the brokenness of our whole world. Give me courage and confidence to partner with your healing and restoring work. Help me to listen and act in ways that share your love for all of creation. Amen.

Monday, April 29

Scripture: Romans 8:19-25

The whole creation waits breathless with anticipation for the revelation of God's sons and daughters. Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice—it was the choice of the one who subjected it—but in the hope that the creation itself will be set free from slavery to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of God's children. We know that the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labor pains up until now. And it's not only the creation. We ourselves who have the Spirit as the first crop of the harvest also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and for our bodies to be set free. We were saved in hope. If we see what we hope for, that isn't hope. Who hopes for what they already see? But if we hope for what we don't see, we wait for it with patience.

Observation

This passage from Romans reminds us that humanity is not alone in experiencing the goodness of God's creation, nor the consequences of our brokenness. But we are not without hope! God invites us to transform our ways, that all of humanity, every creature, and all the earth might be restored. Verse 22 tells us that "the whole creation is groaning together," reminding us that we

are not alone. Each part of God's creation relies on one another for joy, sustenance, and life. What might creation be saying to us today?

Application

As I write this, I am sitting outside, listening to the sounds of birds singing. This is one of my favorite parts of spring. Imagine what their songs tell: do they declare the goodness of God for protecting them through the winter? Do they sing out with hope that their natural habitats might be safe? How do the songs of creation inspire you today?

Prayer

Life-giving God, thank you for the gifts of creation. Help me to listen more closely to the cries and needs of your creation, knowing that you have called me to care for all of your created world. Give me hope when I feel despair, and help me to act in ways that lead toward healing for all your creatures. Amen.

Did You Know?

According to the MN Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota has 246 species of breeding birds. If we listen, especially in the Spring, we hear thousands of songs every day. Some birds spend up to 70% of their day singing. They sing to mark territory, to attract a mate; perhaps they sing songs of praise! Today, listen for bird songs when you are outside. To see a great video and learn more: <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home>

Tuesday, April 30

Scripture: Isaiah 24:4-5

The earth dries up and wilts;
the world withers and wilts;
the heavens wither away with the earth.
The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants,
for they have disobeyed instruction,
swept aside law,
and broken the ancient covenant.

Observation

The prophet Isaiah knows how to make an impact with his words. These verses remind us of the ways that our actions have caused harm: "the earth lies polluted under its inhabitants, for they have disobeyed instruction." The result of this causes harm to God's created earth, its creatures, and to its most vulnerable people.

According to the World Health Organization, "3.6 billion people live in areas highly susceptible to climate change. Despite contributing minimally to global emissions, low-income countries and small island developing states (SIDS) endure the harshest health impacts. In vulnerable regions, the death rate from extreme weather events in the last decade was 15 times higher than in less vulnerable ones." (<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>)

Application

Have you considered the ways our mission to grow in love of God and neighbor might influence personal habits around creation care? One way we can care for the most vulnerable is by caring for creation and thereby limiting harmful effects. Reflect today how you might shift one personal habit as a sign of discipleship and love for one another. Whether it's turning off a light

when you leave the room, studying up on recycling practices, or something else – I invite you to make one small change today, as an act of love.

Prayer

God of all creation, I confess that I have caused harm by what I have done, and what I have failed to do. Forgive me, O God. Guide me on the path of healing and help me to act in ways that honor you. Amen.

Did You Know?

As we think more about what we buy and how we get rid of the packaging (and what is left over when we're done using it) have you ever asked "I wonder how long it takes for this to decompose in the landfill?" Great question! For some answers to this question:

<https://recyclops.com/how-long-does-it-take-to-decompose/>

Wednesday, May 1

Scripture: Nehemiah 9:6

You alone are the LORD. You alone made heaven, even the heaven of heavens, with all their forces. You made the earth and all that is on it, and the seas and all that is in them. You preserve them all, and the heavenly forces worship you.

Observation

The book of Nehemiah tells of us about the restoration after the Babylonian exile. Throughout this book, we're given examples and encouragement to thrive through difficult situations. It helps address questions like: Has God abandoned us? Will we be delivered? Is there hope after hardship? The verses read today are one response to these questions. Collectively, they say: *Yes. God is with you, and all of creation.*

Application

One of the ongoing themes throughout scripture is God forgiving God's people who have gone astray. Another is God's assurance and comfort that we are not alone. When we consider, this week, the ways we have caused harm to the earth, both messages are necessary. The story of God reminds us that it is not too late to try again, to turn toward God, and be transformed. And that even when the work set before us is difficult, we are not alone, but God will see us through.

Prayer

Holy One, as Nehemiah declared, "you alone are the LORD. You alone made heaven...You made the earth and all that is on it, and the seas and all that is in them. You preserve them all, and the heavenly forces worship you." Help me to follow you more closely today, and to care for the beautiful world you have made. Amen.

Did You Know?

The Three Rivers Park District is the largest parks agency in the county, with approximately 17,000 acres of parks and 140 miles of regional trails. Named after the three rivers in Hennepin County — the Mississippi, the Minnesota, and the Crow — Three Rivers Park District owns and manages 5 park reserves, 9 regional parks, and 3 special recreation features within the county. What a great way to get out and enjoy Creation—go to a park! For ideas of where to go, things to do, programs and events: <https://www.threeriversparks.org/locations>

Thursday, May 2

Scripture: John 1:3

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

Observation

There's something both inspiring and restorative about spending time in creation. My family is fortunate to live near Theodore Wirth Park, and we love to walk the trails near our house. We often see deer, turkeys, ducks, and wildlife. And, of course, we are surrounded by beautiful, tall trees. Being in nature reminds me that I am part of something larger than myself, and God has intentionally made us to live and work in harmony with one another.

Application

How does the beauty of God's created world inspire and encourage you? If you can, spend time outside today. Breathe in deeply the spring air, listen for the song of the birds, watch as the trees begin to bloom. And as you do, remember: God has created you in love, and has called you to love.

Prayer

God of all creation, thank you for the reminders of your presence all around me. May the gifts of nature encourage me to breathe deeply, love boldly, and rest comfortably in you. Amen.

Did You Know?

From Genesis through Revelation, the Bible contains more references to trees and wood (over 525) than to any other type of living organism except humans. Minnesota is home to 53 native tree species. As trees grow, they help stop climate change by removing carbon dioxide from the air, storing carbon in the trees and soil, and releasing oxygen into the atmosphere. Trees provide many benefits to us every day. <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/trees/native-trees.html>

Friday, May 3

Scripture: Genesis 41:46-57

Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout Egypt. During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it. Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure. Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering." The seven years of abundance in Egypt came to an end, and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in all the other lands, but in the whole land of Egypt there was food. When all Egypt began to feel the famine, the people cried to Pharaoh for food. Then Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph and do what he tells you." When the famine had spread over the whole country, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe throughout Egypt. And all the world came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe everywhere.

Observation

In this part of Joseph's story, we see how he helps Pharaoh through a famine. Joseph makes and executes a plan to save and store food wisely so that there will be enough for the people. While God has given us a big responsibility to care for the earth, God has also given us the wisdom and means to do so. What might we learn from this part of Joseph's story?

Application

Food is a critical part of our daily lives, and food waste plays a major role in climate change. According to the United States EPA, "When food waste decomposes in a landfill without oxygen, methane is born. Methane is ~20 times more harmful than carbon dioxide, rapidly contributing to the destruction of our ozone layer." The good news is that we can improve our practices around food and waste, to help nourish our bodies, communities, and make a positive impact on the world. Here are a few simple ideas: (1) Many local communities have begun composting, which is a simple way to make a big impact. Look up your city and see what resources are available. (2) Try meal planning this week or set aside a "leftover day" to clear the fridge before food goes bad. (3) Keep a food diary of what you throw away. How can this influence your shopping and cooking practices?

Prayer

Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest. Let these gifts to us be blest. By thy hand, we all are fed. Thank you, Lord for daily bread. Amen.

Did You Know?

Each year, one third of all food that is produced globally for human consumption--roughly 1.3 billion tons--is wasted. "It's estimated that Americans waste 30-40% of all food produced, or approximately 63 million tons each year. To put that in perspective, if all that food we wasted annually came from one farm, that farm would be three quarters the size of California, and it would harvest enough food to fill a 40-ton tractor every 20 seconds.

Saturday, May 4

Scripture: Genesis 9:13

I have set my [rainbow] in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

Observation

At the end of Noah's story, God offers a sign of promise to them, and to us. A sign of God's presence, of God's ongoing restoration, and of God's forgiveness. This sign is a rainbow -- a beautiful arch of color that stretches across the skies, as a sign of promise.

Application

One of my favorite things about rainbows is the way they inspire surprise and delight. Every time one appears, you can hear the chorus, "oh, look! A rainbow!" It's almost impossible not to smile and feel joy when you see them. That is a gift, too: a reminder from God to find joy and know delight. To trust that even in surprising places, God will show up. What other signs of God's presence and love are around you today?

Prayer

God of the rainbow, thank you for this beautiful world you have given us. Help me to find joy in the gifts of your creation, and trust that you are with me. Amen.

Did You Know?

Have you ever looked at clouds and noticed shapes? What are clouds? Clouds appear when there is more water vapor in the air than it can hold. The water vapor (gas) condenses to form tiny water droplets (liquid) and it is the water that makes the cloud visible. These droplets are so small that they stay suspended in the air. Clouds affect climate in two major ways. First, they are an essential part of the [water cycle](#). Clouds provide an important link between the rain and snow, oceans and lakes, and plants and animals. Clouds also play an important role in warming and cooling our planet. However, as Earth's climate warms, we won't always be able to count on this cooling effect. Learn more! <https://climatekids.nasa.gov/cloud-climate>