

Creation Care... a Gospel Issue

Ed Covert 8.12.19

A Salvationist's theology of creation care is like a three-legged stool. The legs representing our relationship with God, with each other... our shared humanity, and our relationship with *and* to the earth. Damage, breakdown, brokenness and loss to any one of the three legs must be restored so that the stool can function for the purpose it was created for.

A right relationship with God activates a rhythm and tempo for life that opens our eyes to see and our ears to hear the "music of the spheres." Our job as Christians and stewards of the planet is to protect and preserve the beauty of creation in such a way that it inspires a sense of awe, wonder, praise and a desirability to know the creator.

Ever since the fall (Genesis 3) however, the heart of man has been corrupted and seeks to avoid the obvious good for the thrill of the forbidden. The forbidden fruit today with respect to creation care is runaway exploitation of natural resources on land and sea, the degradation of forests, and over consumption. The pursuit of this fruit often ignores the unintended or disregarded consequences to the poor and marginalized. The obvious good of caring for the earth and our neighbors can no longer be ignored or dismissed but needs to be recaptured as a vital ethic for a sustainable planet and Kingdom living.

Here are seven common maxims found within the current literature on creation care that could guide our actions and conversations on this important topic.

1. **"Earth Keeping"** (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15 and 13:17; Deuteronomy 20:19-20) These passages are essential to our grasp of humanities standing and responsibility before the Lord to care for, and guard and sustain the health and vitality of all creation, not just the human species. When we see our place in creation and experience God's deep love and affection, it should move us to care about the totality of creation as a response to God's love for us.
2. **"Fruitfulness"** (Genesis 1:20-22, 28; Psalm 104:10-13; Psalm 23:2-3; Psalm 148) God's provision is endless and timeless (Hebrews 1:1-3), we have seen however that the fruitfulness of the earth is finite. We have lost species, we have nonrenewable sources of energy, etc. Therefore, creation care must model a commitment to conservation, a willingness to adjust and manage consumption, and caution against overproduction and waste.
3. **"Sabbath"** (Genesis 2:1; Exodus 23:10-12; Leviticus 26:3-4; Mark 2:27) We cannot continue to relentlessly exploit the land and arrogantly embrace a subdue and dominion mindset over a stewardship mind set for the care of creation. The sabbath was made for us as Marks gospel records, and as God has given the sabbath to all humanity to rest, restore, and renew, so we should provide the same level of care for all creation.
4. **"Discipleship"** (John 1:3-4; John 3:16; Colossians 1:16, 19-20) God in His love for humanity and all creation came as Jesus to earth to put an end to the sin and death that had corrupted the earth from the time of Adam's fall. Unlike the first Adam who in his disobedience led humanity down a path of brokenness, and pain, this Jesus, the last Adam, brought with him healing, redemption, reconciliation and restoration for us and all of creation (Romans 5:12-17). Romans 8:19 reminds us that all creation waits in eager

expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the sake of the earth and all its inhabitants, the Church can no longer be the church in exile when it comes to speaking truth to the issues of creation care.

5. **“Kingdom Priority”** (Matthew 6:9-13,33; and Philippians 4:19) Because of Jesus we are a resurrection community that is living in a redeemed and restored kingdom. As God’s agents here on earth, our part is to help renew and restore creation. God’s desire is for a redeemed creation to inhabit a new kingdom here on earth.
6. **“Contentment”** The constant drive for more, and bigger, better, faster, and richer puts life and the planet on an unsustainable trajectory. The “least of these” among us have little hope to mitigate the impact of the relentless pursuit of ‘more’ and its effect on the environment we share. Contentment is found in seeking and doing God’s will in life, and in the care of the earth and all its inhabitants. We must then flee from those things that relentlessly exploit and degrade the planet and find contentment in God’s faithful provision... that will always be enough (1Timothy 6:11-12).
7. **“Praxis”** We must practice what we preach (Ezekial 33:31-32 and Luke 6:46). God’s call to care for creation and all inhabitants of the earth reverberates all through the pages of scripture and we are without excuse when we ignore the groanings of the earth (Romans 1:20).

This is an important message for all generations. From the oldest to the youngest inhabitants of the earth, we share a common humanity and need for a world where peace and beauty are valued and dignity and respect the rule for all life. The practice of making the world a better place (eco -justice) than what you received is a call to action with far deeper meaning than the concept of just hoping to leave the world better than you found it.

General Peddle, in a recent blog post challenged all Salvationists in this way “We may think that the individual gestures we make will do little to counter the damage already done. Let’s remember the images of smallness Jesus uses to describe the caring actions of his followers: salt, yeast, mustard seed.... Let’s also imagine the international Salvation Army acting together. What might be our collective impact if every ministry unit was more responsible with its garbage? What might be our collective impact if every division, every territory imagined ways that we might work out our salvation with God’s good creation in mind?”

Come on church.... we can do this!

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