

**“A God of the Belly,” by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. (Delivered by Emmett Floyd) L2070304
Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18 and Philippians 3:17-4:1
Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 4 March, 2007**

Elon Community Church has a wonderfully active Green Church Committee. They have been reminding us of the ways in which we can cut down on energy usage, waste, and carbon dioxide emissions. In some of their early deliberations, they talked about composting. This is the art of taking commonly used items and letting them decompose and decay into fertilizer that improves soil structure and nutrients. Through their efforts, they secured an anonymous donation of two compost tumblers to the church. We are grateful to those who made this gift to the church. The composters will allow us to reduce the amount of trash that we haul away to the curb. When we have church dinners, we will be able to take much of our waste and turn it into nutrients for gardens and plants. We are switching from the use of styrofoam to paper cups. Whereas Styrofoam does not break down, paper is a good ingredient for compost.

The green church committee wanted to have a special Sunday on which to dedicate the compost tumblers, and set that date as today.

Now, how does a minister select a scripture for preaching the dedication of compost tumblers? The term doesn't appear in the Bible. Well, God is great. God is always giving. It turns out that the lectionary readings for this Sunday included two references that speak to the occasion wonderfully.

Why should the minister concern him/herself with such topics as composting, trash, and global warming? Because it is a minister's duty to remind the church that God is concerned about this earth that God created and of which God called us to be stewards. It is incumbent upon us to be concerned about future generations and the kind of world they will inherit.

The apostle Paul wrote a letter to his beloved church in Philippi. The members of that church faced persecution by non-Christian authorities. Furthermore, there was a popular culture around them that advocated freedom from moral restraint. Whereas Paul saw salvation as coming from the heavens, members of the culture saw salvation as coming from self gratification. Paul referred to them in this way: “their god is the belly.” This picturesque phrase describes people who are not concerned about others and not concerned about the earth that God has given as a gift, but are concerned with instant gratification.

The world in which the Philippians lived bears great similarity to the world we face. A god of the belly would produce rampant obesity. In our nation, obesity, measured by a body-mass-index of thirty or more, has increased from fourteen and four-one hundredths of a percent of our population in 1971 to thirty and five tenths percent of the population in 2000.¹

“Their god is the belly” is a great descriptor for a culture that has an insatiable appetite for selfish gratification. We drive our cars anywhere and anytime we please, often without thinking about the consequences. The US imported two and one-half times the oil as the next greatest

¹Statistics from the American Obesity Association,
http://www.obesity.org/subs/fastfacts/obesity_US.shtml

importer, Japan, in 2004.²

“Their god is the belly” describes a culture in which adults and children are bombarded by television, movies, songs, and websites with images of sex without commitment and sex only for personal pleasure.

Finally, “their god is the belly” describes a culture that sells goods with large amounts of wasteful plastic packaging.

In the first scripture lesson this morning, the one from Genesis, it says God took Abraham outside and told him to count the stars. That would be the number of descendants Abraham was to have. Last night, it was difficult to see the lunar eclipse, let alone count stars, because of light pollution in our nighttime sky.

That Genesis scripture is about the covenant that God made with Abraham. God gave the land to Abraham and his descendants. How do you treat a precious gift given to you by your lover? This is the way we should treat the land that God has given us.

There are ways in which we can both love the earth God has given us and imitate Paul in showing personal restraint. As we stand firm in the Lord, we will become subject to him and conform our selfish desires into a desire for God’s glory.

As we glorify God and God’s creation, we can reduce our waste and our energy usage. We can take some simple steps.

First, we can stop and think before we jump in the car to take a trip. Can I combine my errands into one trip? Is this trip necessary? Can I give someone else a ride?

Second, we can use compact fluorescent light bulbs to reduce our electrical consumption.

Third, we can use reduced-flow shower heads to reduce our water consumption.

Fourth, we can take a little extra time and care and try to do some composting of our trash and garbage.

Our Green Church Committee stands ready and willing to help us care for this earth that God has given us. May we treat the earth as the precious gift that it is— a gift from our eternal Lover, God.

²International Energy Agency: *Key World Energy Statistics, 2006*