

It Was Very Good, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. X5080420
Psalm 8 and Genesis 1:24-31
Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 20 April, 2008

Earth Day will be celebrated Tuesday, April 22. The first Earth Day was organized in 1970 by Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin and his assistant Denis Hayes. It was very good. Earth Day was designed to inspire an awareness of and appreciation for the earth's environment. It is reported that twenty million Americans joined in celebrating that first Earth Day.¹ Shortly afterwards, the 1970 amendment to the Clean Air Act was passed and the Environmental Protection Agency was created.² Earth Day has grown so that now half a billion people celebrate it world wide, making it the largest secular holiday in the world.³ It is sort of a holy day that transcends national boundaries, language barriers, and religions: we all live on this tiny planet spinning through space.

A number of years ago, Sue and I traveled to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It is a beautiful city located at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers that form the mighty Ohio River. It's set in a valley surrounded by the Allegheny Mountains. We took the Duquesne Incline up the mountain to the museum that contained photos of the history of the city. One photo taken in 1952 at high noon showed that it was so dark, cars had their headlights on and the streetlights were lit. It looked like midnight because of the smog produced by the steel mills of Pittsburgh.

I'm glad that our awareness has cleaned up our air of the smog and industrial pollutants, although I'm sad that the steel and glass industries responsible for much of the pollution have moved overseas. While many of our laborers are out of work, laborers in China, Brazil, India, and Russia now get to breathe the polluted air. On this tiny planet spinning through space, we are all related to each other.

A headline in Friday's *New York Times* stated, "Empty Bellies Bring Rising Anger." The story said,

Saint Louis Meriska's children ate two spoonfuls of rice apiece as their only meal recently and then went without any food the following day. His eyes downcast, his own stomach empty, the unemployed father said forlornly, "They look at me and say, 'Papa, I'm hungry,' and I have to look away. It's humiliating and it makes you angry." That anger is palpable across the globe.⁴

Is the hunger caused by rising food prices – in part caused by farmers selling their corn for ethanol production – to satisfy our need to power our cars to go to the shopping mall? On this tiny planet spinning through space, we are all related to each other.

As Christians, we believe that God created this earth. The creation stories of Genesis and Psalms tell us that. In the first chapter of Genesis the priestly writer details how God created the earth and the heavens, the plants and animals, and all living things, and then pronounced that "it was very good!"

The psalmist, praising God said, "You have given [human beings] dominion over the works of your hands, you have put all things under their feet." The old word view was that God put everything here for humankind to use for their pleasure. That is an egotistical, arrogant and lethal view. Now, the chickens are coming home to roost. When God said, subdue the earth, I don't

¹ Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earth_Day

²Ibid.

³Ibid. (December 2, 1970)

⁴*New York Times* Friday 4/18/08

believe God meant “Fill up the lowlands with garbage and trash, Dump your toilets and dishwasher into the streams, rivers, and lakes, and blow the tops off mountains to mine coal.” God has given us only a tiny planet spinning through space. It is our duty to be stewards of this planet, not only for us, but for our children and grandchildren.

In August of 1997, Charles Moore, sailing back from Hawaii in his aluminum hulled catamaran, came upon the North Pacific subtropical gyre (“jīr”).⁵ It is a 10 million square mile oval, one thousand miles away from land, twice the size of Texas, filled with plastic, tires, motor oil jugs and even a traffic cone. Scientists now call this trash tsunami “the Eastern Garbage Patch.” The gyre is a slow, deep, clockwise-swirling vortex of air and water caused by the high pressure air that lingers above it. God created the water and the high pressure air. Humans created the plastic garbage. Plastic does not decompose. On this tiny planet spinning through space, we are all related to each other.

The Psalmist said that God has put all things under my feet. I am humbled. What is under my feet is holy ground. Psalm 24 begins, “The earth is the LORD’S and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.”⁶ It’s God’s ground, not mine. It’s for me to take care of for God and for my grandchildren.

I’m proud to be a member of this Elon Community Church. With the help of our Green Church Committee, the Trustees, and other caring members, we have done a number of things to take care of this earth that God has given us. We have installed Composters that we use after church suppers; we have replaced styrofoam plates and cups with paper. We have re-cycle bins in the downstairs office hallway for metal, office paper, printer cartridges, and plastic bottles. Use them. If you see someone throwing plastic or metal into the trash, shame them. (I disapprove of guilt-induced religion, but I am not above using guilt to help others become more environmentally conscious.) We have installed high efficiency Fluorescent bulbs in the hallway downstairs. We have installed fluorescent bulbs in the library that use one quarter of the electricity the old incandescent bulbs used. Up in the ceiling above the balcony in the southeast corner, we have installed the first of thirty fluorescent spotlights. They use one quarter of the electricity the present spotlights use. The light may be a little less than what we presently have, but we will be able to make do. We have replaced all of the original five gallon flush commodes with 1.6 gallon ones. We have installed a high efficiency dishwasher in the parish house that uses one gallon of water per wash. We joined other groups on Mar. 1 to plant oak seedlings in an ecumenical effort to “Heal the Land.” We will host the Elon Community Farmers’ Market beginning Thursday, May 8 from 3:30 - 6:30 p.m. Here, we will be able to purchase locally grown food in place of food that has been shipped thousands of miles using diesel or aviation fuel.

The good news about the environmental crisis and our creation of greenhouse gases, is that we can do something about it. Each of us can. We can drive less and walk and share rides more. We can use less water. We can purchase food grown locally. We can register complaints about plastic packaging to our grocery stores and warehouses and WalMart. Remember that most goods used to be packaged in paper and cardboard that was biodegradable. Plastic packaging does not deteriorate. It ends up in our landfills and in the North Pacific subtropical gyre.

“The earth is the LORD’S and all that is in it.” May the earth be glad because you have been here. May your grandchildren thank you because you protected their earth. May God praise you for being a faithful steward.

⁵Cyber Diver News Network, www.cdnn.info/news/article/a071104.html

⁶Psalm 24:1-2