



# Village Christian Church

*(Disciples of Christ)*

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## Who Cares?

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Friends, as I hope you are aware, this past Monday was what is designated all over the world as Earth Day. In case you didn't know, it's on April 22 each year and here's a brief history of it:

Earth Day's origin traces back to United States events in the 1960s, when there was a dramatic uptick in environmental concerns. With several environmental catastrophes, particularly the Santa Barbara oil spill and the Cuyahoga River fires of 1969, many Americans felt it was time we took a more active approach in the stewardship of our planet. Gaylord Nelson was one of those people.

Inspired by the environmental disasters, the junior senator from Wisconsin established the first Earth Day on April 22 of 1970 to bring light to the issue of environmental responsibility and transforming the public's attitude.

Gaylord, congressman Pete McClosky and activist Denis Hayes organized a "teach in" on college campuses that first year, and a movement to raise public awareness of environmental issues and inspire us to become better stewards of the earth was born.

This was an awakening for many and not long after, Congress passed major initiatives that would become the foundation of the nation's environmental laws – including the National Environmental Education Act, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act.

Beginning in 1990, Earth Day went global and, according to its official organization, EarthDay.org, the day mobilized more than 200 million people in 141 countries to bring the fight for the environment to the global stage. In 1992 the United Nations hosted an Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and in 1995 Nelson received the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his role as the founder of Earth Day.

Now, you may be thinking that Earth Day and care for the environment are very good things and yet at the same time wonder what, if anything, do they have to do with our faith? To which the answer is: A whole lot and then some, friends!

Did you know the scriptures in our Bible mention the Earth 729 times? Before human beings were created, God carefully and lovingly crafted a universe and a planet upon which life can exist.

For example, God placed the Earth in exactly the right place to be a home for us. In space, stars often explode into supernovas. The Earth, however, is positioned so that it doesn't fall victim to collisions with stars. Our moon helps protect us from collisions with space debris, and nearby Jupiter draws away objects that have the potential to hit the Earth. In the universe, too many stars grouped together cause immense radiation – but we have only a few stars near us so that isn't a problem.

We are just the right distance from our solar system's sun... Any closer and we would burn up, any further and we'd freeze. Even the tilt of our planet makes a huge difference. If it was tilted differently temperatures would quickly rise or lower to extremes. Even the size of the Earth is just right to hold the perfect amount of oxygen and carbon dioxide, both which are essential to sustaining life.

And all of that is just the big picture, friends. Zoom in on the mountains, valleys, oceans, lakes, rocks, soil, plants and animals of Earth and there are a billion intricacies of design and purpose that are breathtakingly amazing and beautiful to be discovered – and which, according to our faith, God made and declared to be good...

So, if it's good, it deserves to be preserved, don't you think? Faith calls for us to be agents for God's goodness in the world, and part of that goodness is creation itself!

Another intersection of our faith and care for the environment revolves around gratitude. In Psalm 24 we read that the Earth and everything in it are the Lord's – And there are lots of other places in scripture that say basically the same thing in case we keep forgetting it. Therefore, if we love God, it only makes sense that we should care about that which he went to all the trouble of making for us.

After all, how can one worship a Creator without admiring, appreciating, and respecting what he created? When someone gives us a special gift out of love, our best expression of gratitude is to cherish and take care of it. Faith calls us to appreciate the Earth and all that God put in it!

Yet another intersection of our faith and care for the environment is about responsibility. Genesis 2:15 tells us that after creating everything, God put us humans here also – not just with privilege, but with responsibility. "God took the man and put him in the garden to work it and take care of it," the scripture says.

Now, I'm aware that the creation story also says that God gave us dominion over the earth – telling us to subdue it and rule over the fish, birds and animals. I'm also aware that some people have taken that to mean that the Earth and the forms of life on it are ours to use and do with however we wish...

But that's not a very good interpretation of what God meant, friends. Do we have power over the Earth, the plants and the animals? Obviously we do so that we can use its resources to have food, shelter and so forth... and so that we can study and learn from it... and so we can continue to create in creation...

But I do not believe that God meant for us to have dominion in a careless and selfish way. The word dominion comes from the root word Dominus, which means Lord... And since we are made in the Lord God's image and are called to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, I believe that wise, compassionate and nurturing lordship is the kind that God intended for us to have over his creation.

Think about this: Of all the life that God created, we are the only species who have the power to either destroy or preserve what God made – and that is an enormous responsibility that God has trusted us with! Let us also remember that, on the day of resurrection, when Mary met Jesus, she did not mistake him for a soldier or a king or even a rabbi, but rather a gardener! Faith calls us to be responsible stewards, or caretakers, of all that God created to share with us.

So, my friends, whatever you believe about climate change, global warming, the effects of pollution on the Earth's soil, water and atmosphere, and all those issues – I hope that we can all agree with God when he looked at all he had made and said, "*It is very good*," and that we are willing to accept the responsibility to take care of it and be good Lords over it.

That being said, I think a very important first step we can all take to insure we are being good stewards of creation is to realize that everything we do has an effect on the environment. We tend to think that the issues or things that harm the Earth are all too big for us to be able to do much about them...

But that really isn't true. Two of the biggest problems the world faces are what to do with all the waste or garbage (and especially plastic or toxic waste) that we humans generate, and how to reduce the amount of nonrenewable energy we use with all of the negative effects that has on the earth...

And those are two things that all of us play a big role in. We all produce garbage and use energy every day in our lives. So, if we could each find a way to make just a little less trash and use a little less gas and electricity, it could make a big difference!

Did you know that the average American generates 4.9 pounds of garbage a day? That's 3 times the global average! But what if we could find ways to cut that down to, say, 2 or 3 pounds a day? It's easy to see that could make a huge difference in our landfills and the atmosphere.

We also, on average, each use over 200 pounds of plastic a year (which is the second most in the world) – and we all know that plastic never goes away. It doesn't decompose back into something good for the Earth. It just winds up in the ground and, even worse, in the streams and oceans causing problems. So, what if we could each cut that number in half? What a difference that would make!

Then, when it comes to energy consumption (meaning mainly the amount of gas and electricity we use) – we Americans each use an average of 29 kilowatt hours of electricity a day and over 600 gallons of gas for our vehicles a year. If we could just cut that down a little bit, it would make a big difference too!

Ok, I can hear you thinking now – “But hey, Shelly, we’re already careful about the amount of energy we use, and we grew up with the saying, ‘Waste not, want not.’ Did you forget that a lot of us grew up during WWII, or that now that we are older we don’t use as much stuff or go as many places?”

To which I reply: Yes, I’m sure that most of us here already use less energy and produce less waste than a lot of people – But I am also sure that there are still ways most of us could become even better stewards of God’s creation. Plus, a lot of the steps that we could take to do that are not very hard or complicated.

As you already noticed, I put a list of some things we can do in our daily lives to cut down on waste and pollution in the world on your chairs today. What I’d like to ask is that we take a few minutes now to each look over that list and put a checkmark next to all the things you are already doing. Then, I also want to issue a challenge that we all circle 3 things we are willing to try moving forward.

Don’t worry, I’m not going to ask to see your list when you’re done. This is a review and a commitment that’s just between you and God. I’m just the spokesperson up here today with the job of challenging us all to be better stewards of this beautiful planet that God made and gave us to live in.

Take your time, and Damion will play some music for us while we think and work on our list. For those of you on Zoom, I emailed a copy of the list to you on Friday night if you’d like to look at it.

Thank you for indulging me and participating in this exercise, friends. Let me ask, were you able to put checkmarks next to a least a few things on the list that you are already doing? *(answers)* How about identifying 3 things that you are willing to start doing, were you able to do that? *(answers)*

Ok, last question: Does anyone think that I crossed the line and went from preaching to meddling today? It’s ok if you do – for I think that it’s part of a minister’s job to meddle sometimes to get us to look at our lives and think and pray about how we are living our faith.

So, in honor of Earth Day and out of deep appreciation for the goodness and beauty of God’s creation, the goal today was to invite us all (myself included) to become better stewards of all this that God gave us. For my part, I was able to put checkmarks by a lot of things I am already doing, but I have to admit that I could probably do most of them better.

So, one of my circles isn’t actually on the list – it’s to try to improve on the things that I have already been doing half-heartedly. The other two are to drink from a reusable cup (you might have noticed that I have an insulated tumbler up here today instead of a Carl’s Jr cup) – and to start composting at home.

I invite you to ask me how I’m doing on those goals in a month or so – it will provide some good accountability for me. And, if you’d like, I will also ask you how your stewardship of creation is going every now and then.

Friends, I know that this wasn’t your typical kind of sermon today – but I do think that stewardship of creation is an important subject for us to talk about, and to recognize as a part of our faith. When God looks at all he has made and wonders, “Who cares?” – I hope that it is easy for him to see that we do.

Together we have all inherited the blessings of an amazing, complex, and beautiful world to live in. Every day, if we are paying attention, we get to experience God’s presence and love in the sights, sounds, tastes, aromas, and touches of his creation...

And every day we all make decisions and take actions that either help or hurt the natural environment that God designed for us. So, together let us grow in the gratitude we show and the responsibility we are willing to accept for taking care of God’s garden! Amen.