

22.09.24

Hope for Creation: Our Role in Restoring the Earth

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This week, along with preparing my sermon, I've been working on an assignment for one of my classes at Pilgrim College, *Church: God's Polycentric Experimental Community*. The assignment was to choose a theologian and write an essay on their core beliefs about the church and how their theology has influenced modern Christianity. I chose a German theologian named Jürgen Moltmann. He rediscovered his faith through his experience in a prisoner of war camp during World War II, and this experience shaped his theology. During his time in the camp, he found God's presence even in the midst of suffering and despair, which led him to develop a "theology of hope."

The hope that Moltmann found in the camp deeply inspired me. The cross of Jesus might seem like nothing more than suffering and failure from a human perspective, but God opened a new way of hope through the cross. God raised Jesus from the dead and gave us new life, and the church continues Christ's work through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Moltmann teaches that the church should stand with those who are suffering and proclaim the hope of God's kingdom in the world. His theology emphasizes that the church is not just a religious organization but a community that brings God's will to life in the world.

In today's reading from the Gospel of Luke, we learn that if we build our lives on Jesus' words, we will be like a house built on a solid rock—strong and unshakable. To explain this, Jesus uses the image of a good tree bearing good fruit, while a bad tree produces bad fruit.

This message invites us, especially during the Season of Creation, to reflect not only on our faith but also on how we have used and cared for the earth. The many environmental problems we face today are closely connected to how we, as humans, have lived on this planet.

Physicists say that the core of the climate crisis is that the Earth's temperature has risen by 1 degree Celsius since the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century. According to physicists, the most dramatic temperature rise in the Earth's climate history happened around 50 million years ago, when the temperature increased by 5 to 6 degrees. It took about 20,000 years for that 5 to 6 degrees to rise, but this time, it only took 200 years for the Earth to heat up by 1 degree. This is an extremely rapid change in the Earth's temperature, unprecedented in its history.

Physicists like to calculate what this kind of temperature rise requires. To raise the Earth's temperature this much, an enormous amount of heat energy is needed. To give you a sense of scale, over the last 200 years, it's like four atomic bombs going off every second to generate that much heat.

In 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a special report on global warming. According to the report, if the Earth's average temperature rises by 1.5 degrees, there's a chance that every 100 years, the Arctic sea ice could completely melt

during the summer. If the Arctic ice melts, land glaciers will also melt, causing sea levels to rise.

Additionally, 950 million people will suffer from water shortages, and 24% of the world's population will face a higher risk of flooding.

Throughout history, inventors and scientists dreamed of creating a utopia. They worked hard and constantly researched, hoping that their discoveries and inventions would lead humanity to a better life. These efforts probably helped bring God's love and justice to the world in a positive way. However, at some point, these efforts began to be seen as a way to make money. Inventions and discoveries were turned into products and made for mass consumption, and this mindset has deeply influenced human culture.

If these inventions had been used only by people who truly needed them, the Earth's temperature might not have risen so quickly. But advertising has played a big role in encouraging people to buy things they don't really need. Advertisers now use social media and influencers to follow the latest trends, reaching even young people with things like gadgets, fashion, cars, and food. These products are often presented as symbols of success, making people feel like they must have them.

Human desires for pleasure and consumption directly affect the rise in global temperatures. As long as consumption continues, factories all over the world will keep running 24/7, producing waste that flows into our oceans. New products are constantly being made, while perfectly usable items are thrown away, which leads to rapid pollution of plants, animals, land, and seas.

Have you heard about the cows eating old clothes? There was a shocking video filmed at a beach in Accra, the capital of Ghana. It showed mountains of discarded clothing. Ghana is one of the largest importers of used clothes in the world. These clothes come from various countries, and while exporting used clothing is an important part of waste management, the clothes are not properly handled in places like Ghana. They end up piling up on beaches and riverbanks, causing severe environmental pollution.

As a result, cows eat these discarded clothes, get sick, and die. Fishermen can't even catch fish because of the clothing waste in the water. In some areas, people burn the trash to get rid of it, but this releases toxic substances into the air, creating even more environmental problems.

This situation makes us reflect on how much we cling to material things and the consequences of that attachment. It's good to buy eco-friendly products if we need something, but trying to fix the problem of overproduction and overconsumption with more consumption is not the ultimate solution.

Our habits of consumption and the way we seek comfort have already become deeply rooted in our daily lives. When it gets hot, we turn on the air conditioner to cool our homes, but the hot air coming from the outdoor unit heats the planet even more. Not only factories but also the electronic devices we use every day are causing energy consumption to rise, and the resources we can extract from the Earth are limited.

We often take our daily routines for granted, but we need to reflect on the foundation those routines are built on. The habits that have become part of our lives are speeding up global warming, and we must not forget this.

Of course, it's important to be aware of the environmental issues that are being discussed in society, but what's even more important is to start correcting the problem in our own daily lives. Our thoughtless actions are polluting the environment, and now is the time to change them in a way that helps restore the Earth.

Cutting back on consumption and reducing actions that bring physical comfort and satisfaction might feel inconvenient at first. It's not easy to step away from what we're used to. But in *Genesis 1:27-28*, God says:

"God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"

We are familiar with this verse. God appointed us as stewards of this Earth. Just as good politicians work hard to ensure the well-being of their citizens, we, as caretakers of the Earth, must take the lead in restoring it. And this must begin in our daily lives.

If we work together to protect the Earth, we can give scientists the time they need to find solutions. It's not too late. Just as Jesus was resurrected and became the hope of humanity, we must not see this situation as hopeless. Instead, we need to reflect on our lives and do everything we can to stop polluting the planet. If we do that, we can leave a beautiful Earth for our children and future generations.