

(Trinity Sunday)

The Psalmist, Dr. Seuss and God

Psalm 8 and The Lorax

O Lord, our Creator, how majestic is your name in all the earth! When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Matthew 26:47-52 Psalm 24:1

"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. The world and all the people who live in it, belong to God the Creator."

In July of 1969, all of the world's eyes would turn skyward, as America launched Apollo 11 towards the moon, and Neil Armstrong's famous "Giant leap for mankind" onto the surface of the moon.

However, the month before that, in June 1969, all eyes were turned towards Cleveland, Ohio, and not to watch the Cleveland Indians or Cavaliers play ball. No, all eyes, if you remember, were watching an incredible sight – the Cuyahoga River was on fire! The river having been polluted from "decades of industrial waste – caught fire on a Sunday morning in June 1969 near the Republic Steel mill, causing about \$100,000 worth of damage to two railroad bridges." Residents of Cleveland put up with the smog and industrial pollution because the mills and factories supplied their jobs, but at an increasing cost to their own health.

My family lived near Cleveland, in the Mohoning Valley surrounded by the steel mills of Youngstown. I remember driving past the mills, the fires roaring inside to make the steel and thick smoke billowing from their smoke stacks.

Downwind of those mills, and those in Pittsburgh, Detroit, and Buffalo, were the beautiful Allegheny and Catskill Mountains, and the finger lakes of upstate New York. In those fabulous vacation spots, east coast residents flocked to their lake homes and resorts for fishing and summer getaways. Except a strange thing was happening in those areas, trees were dying as were the fish. Scientists began to study the environment and ecology of the area. They discovered what we know as "Acid Rain" to be the culprit.

According to what is left of the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), "Acid rain results when sulfur dioxide (SO₂) and nitrogen oxides (NO_x) are emitted into the atmosphere and transported by wind and air currents." Factories were emitting these kinds of waste into the air, it was being carried downwind, and then dumped on the mountains and lakes in the form of rain and snow, killing plants, trees, and wildlife.

When I was serving in Indianapolis, we took a mission trip out east. On our way back we stopped by to visit the Head of Staff, Fred Mathias, and his family at their summer home in upstate New York. Fred had arranged some ski boats to

take the kids out onto Big Moose Lake. Big Moose Lake, he told us, was what the referred to as a "dead" lake, because all the fish had been killed by "Acid Rain." Decades later, the lake had still not recovered and never would, we were told.

While industrial pollution and its effects on the environment were becoming a concern, so was the issue of littering. The term "Litterbug" entered our vocabulary as did the phrase: **"Every Litter Bit Hurts."**

In perhaps the most famous of all public service announcements ever to appear on television, the **"Keep America Beautiful"** campaign ran the ad known as the **"Crying Indian."** Do you remember the commercial? What about their slogan? **"People Start Pollution. People Can Stop It."**

Americans were abusing the earth and learning that its abundant resources were not so abundant. Scientist and environmentalists were sounding the alarm, calling us to pay attention to what we were doing now, for its long lasting effect on our planet Earth.

On April 22, 1970, Wisconsin's US Senator Gaylord Nelson, who said: **"We only have one earth, we should take care of her"** began **"Earth Day."** Some of you may remember the very first one.

With the growing concern for the abuses heaped on Mother Nature, and our responsibility to our planet, Theodor Geisel, "Dr. Seuss" wrote his book – The Lorax, introducing us to Mr. Once-ler, who discovers there is money to be made from the Truffula Trees.

Employing his family and many others, he clear cuts the forests, with little regard for the impact he was having on the environment and wildlife. As Once-ler said to the Lorax: **"BUT business is business! And business must grow! And I biggered my money, which everyone needs!"** Until at last with one sickening "Wack," the very last Truffula Tree is cut down.

Did you know that between 1995-2015, Americans have cut down enough trees for lumber, that we could build a foot bridge from here to Mars! (Lab Girl)

In her book, Lab Girl, Hope Jarhen, a professor of Environmental Science at the University of Hawaii, says: **"Our world is falling apart quietly. Human civilization has reduced the planet, a four-million-year-old life form, into three things: food, medicine, and wood... Planet Earth is nearly a Dr. Seuss book made real: every year since 1990 we have created more than eight billion new stumps. If we continue to fell healthy trees at this rate, less than six hundred years from now, every tree on the planet will have been reduced to a stump.. Every single year, at least one tree is cut down in our name."**

Wow! Think about that for a moment! Every single year, at least one tree is cut down in your name. That kind of makes me feel like a Once-ler.

While he was not the Lorax, and while he did not speak for the trees specially, the Psalmist did speak for God, reminding us that – **"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. The world and all the people who live in it, belong to God the Creator." (Psalm 24:1)**

James L. Mays, Professor Emeritus of Hebrew and Old Testament at Union Theological Seminar in Richmond, Virginia, says: **"The world exists because**

the Lord is and remains sovereign. To see the world is to behold the evidence of the reign of the Creator. To live in the world is to be dependent on the reign of the Lord our Creator."

We believe, God is the Creator of all that is, was and will be. We believe God owns the world and not us. We believe we are called to live in the world serving as "Stewards" of God's creation who are to care for this gift God has given us.

As the Psalmist reminds us in Psalm 8, God as Creator is Sovereign over all the earth and has dominion over us. The Psalmist then says we have dominion over its resources and all things now living.

As God's Caretakers, there is a partnership to our relationship, we are co-creators responsible for caring for, tending to and sharing the earth and its abundance of resources with all other human beings who, like us, live on this planet we call home.

So the question for us as Caretakers of God's Creation, what are we doing to it?

I ask this because the environment, climate change and our responsibility to God's planet has become a major political hot button issue.

So what is our role, as those created in God's own image, who are given responsibility for caring for God's creation and creatures?

If we understand ourselves in the role as Caretakers of the earth, and responsible Stewards for all of God's creation, living as Co-Creators with the Creator, then how is our world view and our every day living among creation shaped by our faith in the Creator?

Are we like the Once-ler in Dr. Seuss' story, saying **"Business is business and business must grow!"** There is money to be made and jobs to create and things to make! Dam the climate, full steam ahead, people!

Or are we called by God to be more like the Lorax, speaking for the trees, the creatures and caring for the earth because they have no voice but our own?

It took the Once-ler cutting down every last Truffula Tree to learn his lesson. His final word is "Unless." **"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.**

"Catch! Calls the Once-ler. He lets something fall. It's a Truffula Seed. It's the last one of all! You're in charge of the last of the Truffula Seeds. And Truffula Trees are what everyone needs. Plant a new Truffula. Treat it with care. Give it clean water. And feed it fresh air. Grow a forest. Protect it from axes that hack. Then the Lorax and all of his friends may come back."

Hope Jahren has a similar suggestion, she says: Plant a tree. And if you do, **"You'll have a tree and it will have you."** And in that new relationship, we will have God too!