

Earth Sunday Sermon 2009 (7-minutes)

Many of you are aware that Flagstaff Federated Community Church is a partner church with Eco-Justice Ministries, based out of Denver. Much of the information used to compile this short talk came directly from Peter Sawtell, the Executive Director of Eco-Justice Ministries. It may seem odd, but this talk will tie-in with the scripture from Jeremiah Chapter 4, verse 11, which many of you know as the “den of robbers” scripture.

Two years ago we held an event here calling for an 80% Reduction in Carbon Emissions by 2050. It was part of the national Step It Up campaign. Today as new scientific findings reveal the rapidly advancing crisis, climate change experts see an 80% reduction in greenhouse gasses as the MINIMUM action in working for a stable climate.

In his important new book, *The Bridge at the Edge of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability*, author James Gustave Speth writes.....

How serious is the threat to the environment? Here is one measure of the problem: all we have to do to destroy the planet's climate and biota and leave a ruined world to our children and grandchildren is to keep doing exactly what we are doing today, with no growth in the human population or the world economy. Just continue to release greenhouse gasses at current rates, just continue to impoverish ecosystems and release toxic chemicals at current rates, and the world in the latter part of this century won't be fit to live in. But, of course, human activities are not holding at current levels -- they are accelerating, dramatically. ... We are thus facing the possibility of an enormous increase in environmental deterioration, just when we need to move strongly in the opposite direction. (End quote).

For our Christian religion to be relevant and transformative we need to make it clear that we are not meeting the moral and practical challenges of our time if we are satisfied with “holding even” on our environmental impacts. I believe the most recent calculation for our carbon footprint shows that at our current rate of consumption it would take three planet earths to be sustainable. And if everyone lived as Americans do.....well, that's just not possible.

Did you know that in the good Ole USA we have figured out how to extract more than 8000 horsepower from a dragster car just so we can propel it to 300mph in 4.5 seconds? Yep, it's awesome, consumes fuel at the same rate as a 747 jumbo jet! Talk about fuel economy, to heck with 40mpg, this thing consumes more than 40 gallons per mile! And it only costs about \$1000 per second to run!.... Imagine what an organization such as Healing Waters Intl could do if those financial resources were available to them. How many tens of thousands of people could gain access to clean drinking water?

Do we have any NASCAR fans out there? Well, it only takes 240,000 gallons of racing fuel per year to run those cars. To put that level of consumption in perspective, if you

had a car that got 30mpg and you drove it 12,000 miles per year, you could drive for 600 years with that amount of fuel!

Christians who care about the environment often cringe whenever someone refers to Genesis Ch 1 verses 26-28. It is the often quoted passage which speaks of God giving humans dominion over the Earth. For decades, the Christian environmental movement has struggled to clarify that “dominion” is very different from “domination”. We like to think of it more as “a responsibility to care for all of creation”.

A website for the United Church of Christ states “If the Good News isn’t Green News we are all a bunch of frauds. How can we love God and not be passionate lovers and caretakers of God’s marvelous creation?” It is suggested that every church in America ought to commit to reducing its energy consumption by 20% in 4 years. I’m proud to announce that last year alone, we reduced our gas bill at Federated almost 30%, or \$2700.

I guess before I wrap up my talk I should refer to the scripture lesson I chose....

Picture this, we’re having a Palm Sunday celebration here complete with Jesus riding on a wheeled-donkey down the aisle, the congregation’s singing familiar hymns and waving palm fronds. Then as the music comes to a close, Jesus strides to the chancel, sweeps the silver communionware onto the floor and shouts “It is written!, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers”.

Peter Sawtell writes, “For years I didn’t understand the story about cleansing the temple, and I didn’t understand how it applies to us. We don’t have booths selling sacrificial animals; only volunteers selling fair trade coffee!

The story becomes relevant when we realize that the “den” is where the robbers go AFTER they have committed their crimes. To be explicit: God calls us to lives of faith, justice, and compassion for ALL of creation. In these days, that calling requires us to seek sustainable ways of living in the world, ways that do not exploit and exhaust the earth and its life. Here in the United States, in the most over-consumptive, unsustainable society that has ever existed..... are you retreating to a den of robbers?