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The Earth is the Lord's  
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*Psalm 24.1-2, Isaiah 24.1-13*

***Psalm 24.1-2*, “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.”**

***Isaiah 24:1- 13 (NRSV)***

Now the LORD is about to **lay waste the earth and make it desolate**, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants. And it shall be,

as with the **people**, so with the **priest**; as with the **slave**, so with his **master**;

as with the **maid**, so with her **mistress**; as with the **buyer**, so with the **seller**;

as with the **lender**, so with the **borrower**; as with the **creditor**, so with the **debtor**.

**The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled**; for the LORD has spoken this word. **The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant.**

**Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt**; therefore the inhabitants of the earth dwindled, and few people are left. The wine dries up, the vine languishes, all the merry-hearted sigh. The mirth of the timbrels is stilled, the noise of the jubilant has ceased, the mirth of the lyre is stilled. No longer do they drink wine with singing; strong drink is bitter to those who drink it. **The city of chaos is broken down**, every house is shut up so that no one can enter. There is an outcry in the streets for lack of wine; all joy has reached its eventide; **the gladness of the earth is banished. Desolation is left in the city**, the gates are battered into ruins. **For thus it shall be on the earth and among the nations**, as when an olive tree is beaten, as at the gleaning when the grape harvest is ended.”

These words of universal judgment of the earth in *Isaiah 24* are pretty depressing. They describe a time when human beings and the earth itself will suffer terribly and no one will be able to escape the consequences of what comes on the earth no matter how rich or poor, powerful or powerless someone might be. Isaiah describes a people who have broken the covenant established by God with people. Part of that covenant is obeying God’s laws and caring for God’s creation as told to Adam and Eve and to Noah and his family after the flood. God’s judgment is to allow people to suffer the results of polluting and abusing God’s world and God’s creatures. The pollution and desolation Isaiah describes are relevant when we look at the earth today.

What has most shaped your view of the earth and all the creatures, life, and the natural resources it contains? What people, experiences, teaching, and beliefs helped form the view you hold? People have very different views from the utilitarian: “What can I get out of it to benefit myself?” to a view of creation as sacred and a means of revealing the reality, beauty, and character of God as communicated in the scriptures. I wonder how many of us have had our view of creation shaped by the Bible and passages like the ones we’ve heard today from *Genesis 1*, *John 1*, *Psalms 24* and *Isaiah 24*? I learned when I was very young the Biblical view that the earth is the Lord’s and that it was to be treated well, with care, and with the understanding that it didn’t belong to us. We belong to it for a brief time and then we pass it on to the next generation, hopefully better than we found it. My understanding was also shaped by my mother who was always pointing out birds and animals, flowers and trees, the sunlight, the sky, the moon and stars, whales, you name it. We’d go blueberry picking in the summer and apple picking in the fall. On television we’d watch *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau* which had amazing underwater photography and stressed the importance of conservation. We also watched *Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom* with Marlin Perkins and Jim Fowler. They went to the far corners of the world and studied wild animals in their natural habitats. As a kid I thought it was funny that Marlin Perkins was the big name, but he always seemed to be safe and comfortable in a TV studio while Jim was off somewhere wrestling a water buffalo or something. All these experiences were part of shaping my view of the earth as was my first job which was picking up litter, which I’ve mentioned before. Yesterday we had 18 folks from BBC out picking up litter in town as well as representatives of our Boy Scout Troop. Our small group covered Underpass Road. It doesn’t make one feel kindly toward those who throw cigarette butts and nip bottles on the ground. After picking up trash we came back to the church for lunch and Jill and I sat with Emily Sumner and Donna Kalanick who is the Assistant Town Administrator. I shared that I was going to be talking about the earth is the Lord’s today and how our views of caring for creation are shaped and she mentioned perhaps the most effective TV ad about littering that featured a native American with a tear running down his face as he looked at the littered and polluted landscape. People my age and older know the one I mean – and we shared about how impactful it was in giving us a strongly negative feeling about litter and trashing and abusing God’s world that has stayed with us the rest of our lives.

There a lot of beauty to see in nature and there are also a lot of cool sounds. One of things I look forward to in the spring and fall on the Cape is the passing through of large flocks of Grackles. They’re like blackbirds only they have glossy-iridescent bodies and their bluish heads shimmer in the sunlight. This time of year you see them walking on lawns or gathering in noisy groups in the tree tops. I love to hear the sound of the peepers just around the corner from the church on Route 124. I look forward to once again hearing the wind in the trees because the leaves will burst forth after being gone since last fall. If we listen closely in life, we might be surprised by what we hear.

The Bible’s teaching is very clear that God is the creator of the heavens and the earth and life itself is a gift from God. Today’s scripture from *Psalms 24* states: “**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.” From the story of Creation in the first chapters of Genesis to many Psalms including *Psalms 8, 19, 29, 104, 139* and passages from Isaiah, Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians make it clear that the earth is the Lord’s and we are God’s people or the sheep of his pasture. We are to be God’s caretakers, stewards, or God’s gardener’s. Humanity was placed in the center of Creation to care for it. We don’t own the world, but as God’s caretakers we’re to care for it as God would.

It’s very unfortunate that caring for creation is something that Christians and the Church haven’t done as well we should. Because of our view of God as Creator and the earth belonging to the Lord, Christians have a Biblical mandate that too often has been ignored. For Christians, caring for creation is not a political issue, it’s not a conservative or liberal issue, it’s not an economics versus the environment issue; its about obeying and being faithful to Biblical teaching. The American Baptists came out with a statement about caring for creation more than 30 years ago and even the Southern Baptists have produced a four part statement about our responsibility to care for the earth and its people, creatures, and resources responsibly. The conclusion of the Southern Baptist document stated: “We realize that simply affirming our God-given responsibility to care for the earth will likely produce no tangible or effective results. Therefore, we pledge to find ways to curb ecological degradation through promoting biblical stewardship habits and increasing awareness in our homes, businesses where we find influence, relationships with others and in our local churches. Many of our churches do not actively preach, promote or practice biblical creation care. We urge churches to begin doing so.” From the American Baptists to the Southern Baptists, from more liberal groups to the Evangelical Environmental Network, more denominations and churches are recognizing we have a faith-based obligation and moral responsibility to care for creation.

Failing to care for creation is often a reflection of ignorance, greed, selfishness, apathy, or indifference. Humanity has worshiped for too long at the altar of consumption and convenience and every other living thing and the earth itself has suffered as a result. The images of *Isaiah 24:5-6a*: (“**The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt.**”) are visible in many places around the world today because our irresponsibility as creatures is harming God’s creation. The creation that God made is the “golden goose” that has allowed life to flourish, yet we’re killing the golden goose. When human beings break the covenant that God made with us to care for God’s good creation we all suffer, some more than others, some sooner than others.

The church confesses that God is the maker of heaven and earth and of all things within them. This conviction has great implications for the way we view the world around us. We care for this world, we see beauty in it, we recognize God’s glory expressed in it, we aim to protect it, and we grieve when it is abused and damaged. The church also confesses that God has created all human beings in God’s own image. Regardless of where someone is born, the color of their skin, old and

young, strong and weak all carry the stamp of God's image as moral, ethical, and spiritual beings called into a unique relationship with their Creator. This conviction leads us to view each and every human being as having God-given dignity and being worthy of respect, care, and honor.

Huey Lewis and the News have a song, Small World that says,

“Now we can fight one another Like they do on TV  
Or we can help one another The way it's supposed to be  
If we all give a little It could really mean a lot  
**It's a small, small world But it's the only one we've got.”**

If you want to think more selfishly consider the sign in the window of the Chatham Candy Manor that says, “**Save the earth it's our only source of chocolate.**” Any intelligent and reasonable person can see that the way human beings have been living and using the earth, oceans, air, and water is not sustainable. We are fishing the seas empty of life and filling them with plastic and garbage. We are cutting down the rainforests and lesser forests that are the lungs of the planet. It's urgent that Christians and the Church around the world become passionately involved in fulfilling our God-given task to be responsible caretakers of God's good creation before it's too late.

When we go to Maine like we did for 48 hours this past week, we love getting milk from Smiling Hills Farm in Westbrook. For twelve generations going back to 1720 the Knight family has lived in close connection with the land. They share the following on their website, “As our ancestors carried out the work of the seasons they were keenly aware of the connection between humans, animals and the environment. Whether cutting hay, putting up garden preserves, stacking firewood, cutting ice, tapping trees, or sowing seeds, it wasn't radical to be thoughtful about the environment. **It was common sense.** Today Smiling Hill Farm continues to work in a way that is sensitive to the environment. We bottle our milk in reusable glass bottles, collect whey from our cheese to feed pigs, refuse to apply chemical fertilizers to our fields, and are actively exploring alternative forms of energy. **Each action we take impacts the environment not only for our lifetime, but for the lifetimes of our children and grandchildren.** We pride ourselves on the care we take to minimize our impact on the environment and to contribute to its stability and diversity preserving an agricultural way-of-life for the next generation to experience and enjoy.”

In the days when life was more rural, there was a sense of taking care of the family farm because your hope was that you'd be passing it on to your children and they'd pass it on to their children so you were managing the land and its resources not just for yourself but for future generations. **We need to have that kind of perspective for the whole earth.** As has been said, “We don't inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.” We want to leave them a healthy, beautiful place to live, better than we found it. For that to happen, significant changes need to be made. We need to stop having a utilitarian, extractive view of the earth and regain a Biblical view of the sacredness and goodness of what God has made and to take up our role to be caretakers and

stewards of God's earth and all its creatures. The earth is the Lord's – either we believe that and live our lives based on that truth or we don't, but whether we like it or not, it truly is **“a small, small world and it's the only one we've got.”**

**Prayer:** God, our creator, thank you for all that you have made, and help us remember every day always to take care of your world for Your sake and for the sake of every living thing. Amen.

**Blessing:** "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, **for you created all things, and** by your will they were created and have their being." *Revelation 4:11*

### **Questions for Discussion or Reflection**

1. How would you describe your view of the earth? How do you see creation? (Read *Genesis 1*, *Psalms 146:6*, *Acts 14:15*, and *Revelation 4:11*) What do these verses assert?
2. Do you believe creation “is the Lord's,” or do you have some other perspective? (Read *Psalms 24:1*, *Psalms 89:11*, *Leviticus 25:23*, and *Colossians 1:15-16*) What do these passages tell us?
3. If we believe the earth is the Lord's, what implications does that have for our lives? For how we treat the earth and all its creatures?
4. What view do you think has been and continues to be the prevailing perspective toward the earth (the air, the land, the oceans, and all that lives in them) among individuals, corporations, and governments?
5. When the word steward (manager, servant) is used in the Bible, it refers to a person who is put in charge of taking care of something that does not belong to him or her. How do you understand and carry out your role as a caretaker or manager, of God's creation? How does being a steward of God's creation impact the decisions you make, for example, about what and how much you buy and consume?
6. How can we as a church and how can you as an individual do a better job of living out a Christian worldview of valuing God's creation?