

**Sermon – April 25, 2021 (Earth Day observance)**

**First Congregational UCC, Eagle River**

**L. Gail Irwin, Interim Pastor**

**Ken Lynch, Scripture Reader**

**Prelude:** “For the Beauty of the Earth”

(Hymn Tune: DIX)

Contributors: Anne Krentz Organ; One License Song #AF2020210

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**Announcements:** Hello and welcome to worship at First Congregational UCC in Eagle River. This is the service for Sunday, April 25<sup>th</sup>, and we’re honoring Earth Day today! If you are watching on a tablet or your phone, or even your laptop, you might want to sit outside and enjoy the service out in nature today!

A few announcements: articles for *The Mouse* are due tomorrow morning.

**Next Sunday, May 2<sup>nd</sup> will be Camp Sunday**, and we’ll feature video and stories from our beloved Moon Beach camp and learn about ways we can enjoy and support the camp this summer, plus some special music from camp director Phoebe Spier!

May 2<sup>nd</sup> will be our last pre-recorded service as we pivot to in-person worship. **On May 9<sup>th</sup>, Mother’s Day, we will hold two services in the building, one at 7:30 AM and one at 9:30 AM.** You will need to **sign up in advance** for these services for the immediate future, by **calling the church office before Thursdays at 3 PM each week to reserve your spot.** Worship will still be recorded and posted to YouTube on Sunday afternoons for those who wish to watch from home.

You should be receiving a letter from the Council with all the details about in-person worship, if you haven’t already. I’m excited to meet all of you in person on or following May 9<sup>th</sup>!

This week I got my second vaccine! I’ll be fully vaccinated by about May 4<sup>th</sup> and can get out and see vaccinated people more. Please let me know if you want a visit at home, especially if you’re homebound! And if you have not yet been vaccinated, **please schedule yours now**, for your own health and everyone around you! Let’s be a good example to others in the community!

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**Opening Prayer:** (Francis Brienens, UK)

Bright and beautiful God, thank you for our world,

A place full of beauty and variety.

Thank you for the wind and the waves,

The stars in the sky, the changing of seasons,

The animals in all their splendor.

Thank you, God, for the gift of people, men, women, and children,

Of many colors and crees, in different shapes and sizes,

With many gifts and talents, all made and loved by you.

Thank you, God, for the variety of life;

Everything points to your love and glory. Amen!

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### **A Sermon for All Ages:**

Maybe you remember on Easter Sunday, I showed this picture of Jesus when he rose from the dead and talked to Mary Magdalene, and how he looked like a gardener in a wide brim hat (at least according to Rembrandt)

- We don't know if Jesus ever planted a garden, but he did talk about flowers and birds and went out into nature to pray, so we know he loved God's beautiful world
- What do you love most out in nature? Wild animals? Snow? Lakes for swimming? Do you ever plant seeds and grow veggies or flowers?
- We are lucky on our farm to be around nature all the time!
  - We grow raspberries and peas and currants
  - We take care of heifers and dogs and even bees
  - We grow baby chicks into chickens
  - We enjoy growing flowers or just looking at butterflies and song birds
- If you're going to be around nature, you need to help take care of it
  - To keep a pet, you feed it, wash it and take it to the vet
  - To plant a garden, you work the soil, weed and harvest
  - God created all these beautiful things for us to enjoy, but also care for!
- This week was Earth Day, a time when we think of ways to take better care of the earth;
  - People have made the air dirty and thrown trash around;
  - We can help clean things up with simple tasks like recycling, riding your bike instead of driving, and picking up trash on your road (Adopt a Hwy);
  - Christians do these things because GOD made all these beautiful things, and when we hurt them, it makes God mad and sad!
- Think of one thing your family can do this week to care for nature;
  - Grow some flowers that bees like to eat from
  - Collect recycling and take it to the dump
  - Organize our Adopt a highway group to clean up!
- If we all behave like this is our garden, and we are its gardeners, the dirty places in the world might be resurrected to be as beautiful as God first made them!

**Dear God, we are truly sorry we've done things to make the sky and water and soil dirtier. We want to do better. Teach us what to do, and help us to keep loving this beautiful garden we are so thankful for that you gave us! Amen.**

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### **Scripture: Genesis 1**

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup>the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup>Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

<sup>6</sup>And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." <sup>7</sup>So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome

from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. <sup>8</sup> God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

<sup>9</sup> And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. <sup>10</sup> God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. <sup>11</sup> Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. <sup>12</sup> The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. <sup>13</sup> And there was evening and there was morning, the third day

<sup>14</sup> And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, <sup>15</sup> and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. <sup>16</sup> God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. <sup>17</sup> God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, <sup>18</sup> to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup> And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

<sup>20</sup> And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” <sup>21</sup> So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup> God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” <sup>23</sup> And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup> And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. <sup>25</sup> God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

<sup>27</sup> So God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” <sup>29</sup> God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have

them for food. <sup>30</sup> And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. <sup>31</sup> God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

## Sermon:

I. The story of the creation in Genesis 1 begins with an assumption: *“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth...”*

- a. The writer affirms that all the goodness of the world came from God’s ingenuity and invention, not humans.
- b. God lit the cosmos up, God molded the world, God choreographed it, God planted it, God named it, God arranged it, God impregnated it and God *blessed* everything, calling it all GOOD.

II. This story is one of several stories in scripture about how we humans relate to our our Creator and the Created world:

- a. **Adam and Eve** conspired to disobey God’s command and take what is not theirs
- b. **Cain and Abel** compete with each other in a way that leads to death, instead of cooperating in ways that lead to richer life;
- c. **Noah with his ark** illustrates how God can use nature to judge and punish us when we disobey; but also He uses nature to heal and reconcile with us
- d. And the story of the **Tower of Babel** is about how humans want to “play God” and exert god-like power, but we just end up divided and weakened.

III. These stories display our human tendency to abuse and destroy the glorious habitat, creatures and people God gives us. They remind us that:

- a. God is the Designer in Chief and knows how to maintain Her design
- b. But we must cooperate as creatures, alongside each other, and all the other creatures and alongside God in order to preserve what God gives us;
- c. Humans are NOT in charge, and when we try to be, we damage every other part of the web of life on our planet and in our universe.
- d. But when we cooperate with God, we find our greatest potential as gardeners of God’s Creation.

IV. You all know how incredible God’s creation is; or at least, hopefully, you appreciate how fabulous your tiny corner of the globe is;

- a. You are people who have chosen to live in the North Woods of Wisconsin!
- b. You were drawn here by that beauty and compelled to spend your lives here.
- c. Not everybody wants to get this far from city life to appreciate it, but you do appreciate what the trees and lakes do to enrich your life and soul.
- d. But while we know how good it is, we also know we’re ruining it.
  - i. With our clear cutting of forests and water contamination and depletion of fossil fuels;

- ii. We can argue about *how fast* we're ruining the earth;
- iii. who the worst polluters are;
- iv. But we know what has already happened: the earth's temperature has already warmed by 1 degree in the last century; and we're expecting it will warm by at least another degree or more in this century;
- v. One degree may not seem like much, but we know how serious it is based on what we've seen so far around the globe.
  - 1. The melting of ice sheets causing some coastal areas and islands to become unlivable;
  - 2. More erratic weather patterns, causing the loss of cropland and food production;
  - 3. Loss of at least 500 species of animals in the last 100 years

- V. Christians confess that God made the world, God is sovereign over all of it;
- i. But we must also confess that our abuse of it has caused damage so deep that, at this point, only with God's help can it be repaired.
  - ii. The changes required in our world are so big,
  - iii. The innovation required and the sacrifices that need to be made by our generation and the ones following us are impossible to imagine.
  - iv. And the repair will be so slow, you and I will never see the positive results of our efforts.
  - v. So repairing our planet is a project too big for human effort;
  - vi. Its going to take some miracles from God to help us!

- VI. I remember more than a year ago, Greta Thunberg, the Swedish environmental activist, became a household name as she sailed here on a solar powered boat from Europe and made speeches at world environmental events—an 18 year old girl rallying the world for ambitious environmental policy changes!
- a. I really thought we were reaching a tipping point, when people were starting to pay attention to the climate crisis.
  - b. Then came the coronavirus; suddenly I couldn't even use my re-usable grocery bags at the market anymore!
  - c. We all forgot about climate change for a while;
  - d. But the pandemic has been like a practice round for the world:
    - i. we were forced to work together on solving a global problem;
    - ii. We haven't done well in all areas: many countries still don't have ventilators and vaccines like we do
    - iii. But the fact that there ARE vaccines is a testament to what human ingenuity can do when we work together;

- iv. And I don't believe it was just the scientists who made those vaccines possible: God is helping us!
- v. God wants us to succeed and survive!
- vi. God made this world and loves it and wants to protect it.

VII. We cannot save the planet on our own;

- a. It's not just about you cutting down on plastic packaging or giving up your gas guzzling SUV (but it is about that too!)
- b. It's also about lobbying Wisconsin legislators about the effects of local mining on water quality
- c. Building our economy and creating more green jobs and innovation
- d. Advocating for international climate agreements
- e. Bill Gates just wrote a book called "*How to Avoid a Climate Disaster*". and while he wants us to get to ZERO carbon emissions, which seems impossible on its own, he also points out that for developing nations, it isn't fair or realistic to ask them to continue to go without electricity and running water; we have to allow underdeveloped nations to grow a higher standard of living, while the developed nations give up our polluting lifestyles;
- f. The health of our planet is a global issue, a legislative issue, an economic issue, a poverty and wealth issue, a science issue, AND it is a theological and ethical issue:
  - i. It gets really personal and close to home when we realize that WE are the ones who have cut down trees and cleared waterfronts in order to enjoy God's creation here in Eagle River; yet we don't want everyone to do what we did, because it would spoil our piece of paradise!
  - ii. It's personal for me in a farm family, because it means changing farm practices that deplete soil and contaminate water; It effects every level of our lives and world!

VIII. Healing the planet is too big a job for us to work on alone, or even with one church. But we have to start somewhere;

- a. The National UCC has begun an initiative called the Kairos Call to Action
- b. We heard about this at last year's Annual Meeting, where we listened to an address by Tia Nelson, the daughter of Gaylord Nelson, who started Earth Day in 1970
- c. The UCC is asking each local church to make specific commitments to creation care and to create a covenant that affirms that your church wants to actively engage in care of creation, to ensure that such work is part of all the other work of the church: in our worship, education, community outreach, upkeep of our building, and at coffee hour where we won't use those horrible styrofoam cups.
- d. The Creation Care Team hopes to have at least 100 congregations joining in this call by the end of this year!

- e. The Creation Care Team is working to support congregations and their members through resourcing, advocacy, and connections, so the churches involved can help each other and learn together.
- f. The effort is to encourage any lifestyle changes, policy advocacy, and education that leads to a cleaner, healthier world.

IX. The effort may seem small but it is where all of us have to start; and to encourage each other so the work of creation care will not feel gloomy! Already I've heard some inspiring stories:

- a. In Madeline Island, the churches joined together to do a project for food sustainability where local farmers sell their produce at a stand given to them by the churches;
- b. Our Conference office installed a solar panel in the roof to lower our energy costs
- c. Churches are doing community gardens and establishing zero waste policies; we are learning about the connection between racial justice and environmental justice and lobbying for green policies and learning how to compost.
- d. You have several things going for you at First UCC in Eagle River in regard to environmental ministry:
  - i. You live in a place inhabited by people who love the outdoors and want to protect it; you have members who have special skills in this area;
  - ii. You are close to our Moon Beach camp, a site for outdoor ministry and education (we will talk about that more next week)
  - iii. You even have an empty lot across the street, a piece of holy ground that may have some potential you haven't dreamed of yet to honor faithful creation care!

X. Healing the planet is too big a job for humans alone. Obeying God is the only way we can begin to heal the damage we've done to it.

- a. Do we believe God has the power to do miracles of resurrection for our planet after all the damage we've done to God's good garden?
- b. And are we willing to make some sacrifices and act with creativity, not just as individuals, but as Christ's body in the church, to reduce our negative impact on the earth?
- c. If you want to learn more about the Kairos Call to Action, if this feels like a passion you want to act on, I'll put up some information on the screen or you can ask me to send you more information.
- d. Meanwhile, this spring, get outside, soak up the deep goodness God has surrounded you with, and figure out what your role is in protecting it.

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**Hymn:** "God of the Sparrow"

(Words by Jaroslav J. Vajda – Music by Carl Schalk)

One License Song #01556

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*God of the sparrow, God of the whale  
God of the swirling stars;  
How does the creature say Awe?  
How does the creature say Praise?*

*God of the earthquake, God of the storm  
God of the trumpet blast;  
How does the creature cry Woe?  
How does the creature cry Save?*

*God of the rainbow, God of the cross,  
God of the empty grave;  
How does the creature say Grace?  
How does the creature say Thanks?*

*God of the ages, God near at hand,  
God of the loving heart;  
How do your children say Joy?  
How do your children say Home?*

**A Pastoral Prayer** (Ojibway Nation, Canada)

*Grandfather, look at our brokenness.*

*We know that in all creation only the human family has strayed from the sacred way.*

*We know that we are the ones who are divided,*

*And we are the ones who must come back together to walk in the sacred way.*

*Grandfather, sacred one, teach us love, compassion and honor,*

*That we may heal the earth and heal each other...*

Lord, hear our prayers for our world,  
For those who live in the path of environmental destruction,  
natural disaster or the poisoning of resources.  
Hear our prayers for the earth itself, for all animals, for insects and birds,  
For the soil and air and water you made in love...  
Teach us to be more faithful gardeners and help us heal all the brokenness we have caused.

Hear our prayers for our nation, our community, and our church  
And for those close to us who need your care...

For our homebound and those who are sick; for those dealing with unemployment or mental  
illness; for our children bravely attending school; for our Search Committee and Council...

Lord, we offer our prayers along with the songs of all nature, in gratitude for your abundant  
blessings, and we say the words the Risen Christ taught us...

**The Lord's Prayer**

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**Invitation to Offering:** One of your New Year of Giving recipients this year was Wild Instinct Wildlife Rehabilitation located in Rhinelander. This organization provides quality, ethical wildlife rehabilitation while promoting wildlife stewardship through education and research. They provide rehabilitation to injured or sick wild animals found around the area. In 2019, they received into their care 45 eagles, 21 black bears and 8 common loons, along with many other birds and animals that needed care. Your \$100 gift went to help save these wild animals. Thank you!

Please also remember your church with a pledge or gift, by sending checks to:

**First Congregational UCC, PO Box 1385, Eagle River, WI 54521**

**Benediction/Blessing:** In the beginning, God created everything good. Go now to celebrate and protect the good earth God has given you! Go in peace. Amen.

**Postlude:** “Let There Be Peace on Earth” (By Sy Miller and Jill Jackson) CCLI #1562668

*Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.*

*Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be.*

*To take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally!*

*Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me!*

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