

Sermon for April 19, 2026
"Effecting the Environment"

Genesis 6:5-8

Revelation 21:10-14; 22:1-5

"The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart." We are all familiar with the story of Noah's Ark. It begins with God's heart being broken at what the human race is doing. God is distraught that a creature made in the Divine image would do such violence, and so God decides to clean up the mess that the human race has made. The result is a flood.

Some people think that God will not allow the human race to do massive harm to the environment, but this passage makes me think otherwise. If God would bring on a natural disaster to fix what people had done back then, God would certainly let us bring it upon ourselves now. We have done massive destruction to the environment. Look at the results of strip mining, mountain top removal, destruction of the rainforests, the slaughter of elephants, careless dumping of toxic waste, air pollution, and the list goes on.

Sometimes I think that God may be sorry that we were ever given dominion over the world. We have taken that God given ability to manipulate our environment and we have effected the environment in negative ways. Now, I am not one of those who thinks that humanity should have zero impact on the environment, but the impact we have needs to be responsible. Yet we have irresponsibly trashed the earth and killed off whole species of animals instead of responsibly using and caring for them. If God caused a flood back then, what might God let us do to ourselves if we continue to be so irresponsible?

But my purpose today is not to bemoan the damage done to the environment. My purpose is to offer positive ideas. That's where the second reading from Revelation comes in. At the end of the book of Revelation John is given a vision of the New Jerusalem. Most serious Bible scholars see this New Jerusalem as a metaphor for the church; a vision of what we are supposed to be. That is what the whole 12 gates and twelve foundation named after the apostles and tribes of Israel is all about. This city is the personification of the people of God throughout time. One of the details of this city of God is that in it are trees that bear fruit all year round and their leaves are for the healing of the nations.

Like those trees, we are nourished by the water of life that we receive through our relationship with God in Christ. So we are called to bear spiritual fruits like peace, patience, kindness, love, mercy, etc. And we are called to be a healing influence in the world.

This healing influence is most often understood in terms of spreading the love and justice of God in the world. It is bringing healing into the world through our ministry, but I think it is also a calling to be a healing influence for the world itself. We are called to bear fruit that will bring healing to the environment, and this is not about putting the environment above human needs. If we continue to misuse the environment and not care for it, people will suffer. We need to be more responsible and careful to prevent famine and disease and suffering in the future. A 8.3 billion population cannot continue to take whatever it wants without putting something back and expect it to not detrimentally effect future generations.

So what can we do to be leaves of healing for the world?

First recycle. Recycling has a double impact on the environment. First it reduces the impact of the aluminum or wood and other natural resources taken from the environment to make new things. Then it reduces the amount of waste put back into the environment. The average person produces 3 pounds of garbage a day. That is over a thousand pounds a year. If we could

recycle part of that, imagine the impact. One third would come to 365 pounds a year per person. That would reduce the amount of land needed for landfills in our own community. The county also sells those recyclable items offsetting the cost of waste collection. In the name of fiscal responsibility, recycling makes sense.

In the case of aluminum cans, 20 aluminum cans can be made from recycled cans for the energy of one from raw ore. Recycling aluminum cans saves energy and aluminum does not degrade when it is recycled, so it can be recycled indefinitely.

The story is the similar for glass, and paper recycling. Use of recycled glass instead of raw material saves energy because it melts at a lower temperature. That means it also emits less carbon dioxide and nitrogen oxide, both are greenhouse gasses. Producing paper from recycled paper takes 40% less energy than producing paper from wood. It takes 24 trees to make one ton of printing and office paper. Producing paper from recycled paper also saves 7,000 gallons of water per ton of paper and creates 74% less air pollution and 35% less water pollution.

Recycling is a start but you can also reduce your energy use and waste. Things like adding extra insulation to your hot water heater or to your attic. Things like installing low flow faucet and shower heads. These are all small things but then can add up.

Consider just the savings from changing out lights. We are all familiar with the old fashioned incandescent light bulb. This technology has been basically the same for 100 years. The newer LED or light emitting diodes are even more efficient. A 60 watt incandescent puts out about 800 lumens of light. To make the same amount of light it takes only a 9 watt LED. LEDs are more expensive, but they last much longer making the long term savings worth the upfront cost. LED's also lessens the waste produced by throwing used bulbs away.

Another way to conserve is driving 55. Some of you remember when the nationwide speed limit was 55. Do you remember why it was 55? We were all driving gas guzzlers and driving 55 was supposed to save a lot of gas. It is true a car going 70 mph is 23% less efficient than a car going 55. Don't stomp on the gas when you start off and slow down slower when you come to stop and stay below 55 and you will save gas and money.

Recycling and reducing are great but we can also reuse. We live in a disposable society. We use things then throw them away. If we reused more and threw away less, we could help the environment.

Here is one good example: the reusable grocery bag. They cost about a dollar and you can use them for years. They hold about the same amount of groceries as three plastic bags. Consider the lifetime use three plastic bags times the number of times you use it. Just keep them in your trunk so that you always have them when you go to the store.

If you are a gardener, you can reuse your food waste by composting. It reduces what you dispose of and gives you organic fertilizer for your garden.

God has given us this beautiful world. Let's pass it on to future generations in a better state than we found it. Each of us is a living stone built into the city of God. Working together the church can be a force for change in the world. There are concrete things that any of us can do.

Recycle what you can. Reduce the energy you use. Reuse what you can to reduce waste.

We can all have a positive effect on the environment. What if all Christians strove to care for the planet in these little ways. We could be a force for environmental change and improving the lives of future generations.