

Is It Really That Simple?
Exodus 32:1-6 and Psalm 23
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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What is your favorite thing about nature? What do you love best about creation?

Is it clear waters, birds singing, blue skies, green grass, fields of wildflowers, mountains, beaches, glaciers? There is so much glory in creation, it can be hard to choose a favorite.

So, what then do we do about the reality that so much of the way we live harms these things?

We don't have to look very far to find statistics about microplastics and greenhouse gasses, melting glaciers, ecosystems that are out of balance, and water shortages. And that is just the beginning of a very long list of struggles that are rooted in human habits.

And yet here we are...a people who care... a people who are paying attention...who are trying to do things to be more faithful to our commitment to be good stewards of creation.

Here at First Christian Church we have, for a number of years now, been making choices with creation in mind. From installing bottle fillers to encourage the use of reusable water bottles to being intentional about recycling...from beginning a few years ago to compost to reducing the amount of paper we use for communications...from planting trees to learning about pollinator-friendly plants as we will do today in Faith Formation...from forming a Creation Care Team to taking actions that allow us to claim the designation among Disciples churches of being a Green Chalice congregation. These and others have been deliberate choices. These have been intentional. These are ongoing. We continue to have more conversations about what else we can do to live in right relationship with creation.

And at the same time we live in a world with values from which we are not exempt. Even as we, both individually and congregationally, work to make choices with creation in mind, still we participate in actions that do harm.

We live in a world that values convenience. And convenience often finds us driving from point A to point B across to point D and back to point A - back and forth again. Our valuing of convenience often sees us using single-use plastics and other products that harm our earth.

We live in a world that values accumulation. And in the midst of that we often participate in the building of bigger houses, the buying of new items to fill our already overflowing closets.

And between convenience and accumulation, we have become a throw away culture with landfills overwhelmed.

Today's text is from a time when the people were in between. They were between slavery and finding the place where they would settle. They were figuring out how to be in relationship with God and discovering what that meant. They were also struggling, wondering if they made the right decision, wondering if they walked away from something that wasn't as bad as they thought it was. They were struggling, wondering if they could trust Moses...at least now that he had gone up a mountain, presumably to talk to God. They were wondering if they could trust his return. And so they asked Aaron to build a golden calf, something visible, something to hold onto, something to worship.

Now it's easy for us to say that we are different from them, that we don't worship such things, that we have our eyes on God. And yet, bigger than the details about the golden calf itself, it seems that the struggle within this story is idolatry. Idolatry, most basically defined as putting something else in the place where God should be.

When we hear it that way, then maybe we, too, have this struggle. Maybe we sometimes put our busyness and our accumulation and our convenience in the place where God and God's values belong. Maybe we sometimes put our own wants and desires ahead of the needs of others. Maybe we focus so much on the moment that we lose the big picture as we cease to think about how our actions have an impact on both our human neighbors and all of creation.

But, then there is this reality, too - when we stop and think about it, we can get overwhelmed. Overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem. Overwhelmed wondering if anything we do makes a difference. Overwhelmed with our own guilt and shame for how we have participated. Overwhelmed by the reality that we are comfortable in systems that are shaped from values that are not of God's heart.

And so perhaps our first challenge is to talk about this, to name honestly our own internal conflicts - how we do want to care for creation, and meanwhile how we like our lives, how we resist the inconvenience of caring for creation in the midst of a culture based on convenience. The reality is that it takes a little more work, a little more intention to do even the simple tasks of taking our own bags to the grocery store rather than just using the plastic ones conveniently located at the check out. It takes a different kind of planning to choose to walk somewhere rather than to drive or to choose to delay and combine errands rather than just running them the moment we think of them. So, we are challenged to not allow our shame or guilt or sense of being overwhelmed to get in the way of our commitment to make a difference.

And we are challenged to continue to learn and to grow and to seek out ways that we can make a difference. And then, upon discovering them, to find ways to weave them into our lives. Sometimes this means letting go of long formed habits in favor of choosing something that is better for our earth and better, then, for those of us in it.

What would happen if we turned away from the idols of busyness and convenience and accumulation and other things that disrupt our relationship with creation?

What would happen if each one of us chose one new action this week that we could take on, one - even simple change - that we could adopt as a commitment to care for the earth? And what if next week or next month we added another? And what if next year another?

Actions from reducing our carbon footprint, to choosing reusable rather than single-use containers, to composting, to paying attention to legislation that impacts the earth and speaking up on behalf of creation...the list goes on and on. And it starts with each of us.

So, we heard two scriptures read earlier. The second was Psalm 23. In my experience we typically read this as we think about the ways that God cares for us. When we look for psalms about creation, we might more likely turn to something like Psalm 104 where we hear, "You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal...you cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth" (Psalm 104:10-11a, 14, NRSV).

But let us not miss that Psalm 23, this most beloved of psalms, is set in the midst of God's creation. Perhaps we should not be surprised that so many of us see God most clearly in the natural world. After all, the setting this psalm claims is one of green pastures and still waters, one where God is ever present even in the midst of the darkest valleys.

Friends, we live our lives of faith in this created world. We live as siblings not only of our whole human family, but siblings of the entire animal kingdom alongside the waters and the trees, the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the glaciers. And we have a responsibility to live well in relationship to it all.

The solutions feel complicated, they are complicated. And, maybe they are simple, too. Maybe, one choice at a time, one moment at a time, one commitment at a time, we can once again fall in love with the earth. Amen.