

# SEASON OF CREATION 2021

## SERMON SERIES

The NCCUMC Creation Care Team encourages pastors to preach on the care of creation during the month of September. As an incentive, we have developed some resources to support you in your sermon-writing. The prompts below are for a **non-lectionary series** on the theological basics of creation care, although the pastor of a congregation already well-versed on the topic may discern deeper themes and more specific topics to preach on that are related to the prompts. As always, let the Spirit lead you in your preaching, and feel free to follow the prompts as written or just use them to spark your own imagination. Additional resources will be posted throughout August. If you have any questions or need more resources, please contact Jane Almon ([jalmon@nccumc.org](mailto:jalmon@nccumc.org)) Jarrod Davis ([jdavis@nccumc.org](mailto:jdavis@nccumc.org)), Jacob Dye ([jdye@nccumc.org](mailto:jdye@nccumc.org)), or Jim Galloway ([jgalloway@nccumc.org](mailto:jgalloway@nccumc.org)). We'd love to help!

### **SERIES 1**

#### **From Creation to New Creation: Scriptural and Theological Foundations for Caring for Creation.**

**Sermon 1**—God created everything and called it good. *Genesis 1:1-25*

Oftentimes it's people who may not be on board with the "green movement" that have some of the closest connections to, and deepest loves of, nature. Connect the idea of creation being good with the ways in which your people enjoy nature - gardening, farming, hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, going to the lake/beach. Pair this with Psalm 19 to make the case that not only does God call creation good, but creation also teaches us about how good God is.

Another idea to explore may be the soteriological implications of the creation story. What difference does it make to tell the story of God-with-us beginning with Creation rather than the Fall? It may be argued that the church's emphasis on the brokenness of humanity over the centuries has overshadowed an appreciation of the goodness of creation. How does this play out in the way we interact with our environment? With our fellow human beings?

## Quotes:

- “Divine love is the action that brings creation into being, which means that *God sees each creature and his own love at the same time.*” Norman Wirbza, *From Nature to Creation*, pg. 75.
- “Creation is the good and beautiful place in which God’s love is forever at work.” Norman Wirbza, *From Nature to Creation*, pg. 86
- “An adequate theology of creation becomes the indispensable foundation for the pursuit of justice and peace. Moreover, an adequate theology of creation must include a theology of nature, the very point where indigenous cultural values and theological notions become helpful” - George Tinker, *Creation, Justice, and Peace*.
- “If we human beings could agree to affirm the sacredness of the natural world, if we could begin to live that affirmation, if we could begin to experience the world, including one another, as sacred, then "God's" (theos, in the greek text of the christian Bible) demand for justice would become a vital and consuming concern. And God's desire for peace built on justice would become the human community's passion as well.” - George Tinker, *Creation, Justice, and Peace*
- “Not only do I want to argue that respect for creation must be our starting point for theological reflection in our endangered world, but, more explicitly, I would argue, from an American Indian perspective, that justice and peace would flow as a natural result from a genuine and appropriate concern for creation.” - George Tinker, *Creation, Justice, and Peace*.

## Sermon 2—God gave humans dominion over creation. *Genesis 1:26-31*

What does it mean for humans to “have dominion” over creation? Does it mean we can do what we want with the earth? To keep this exploration rooted in Scripture, talk about what it means to “have dominion” in the image of God. God’s dominion doesn’t look like exploitation, destruction, or oppression. Pair the Genesis passage with a reading from Philipians 2:1-11 to make the case that humanity’s dominion over creation takes the form of loving service, just as Christ’s dominion over humanity takes this form.

A great illustration of this is gardening if that would resonate with some of your people. Norman Wirzba, in *From Nature to Creation*, writes about how gardening teaches us important Christian virtues, such as patience and paying

attention. Gardening also teaches us what it means to be made in the image of God since one of the first ways we encounter God in Scripture is as a gardener. This illustration could be supported with either Psalm 65 or Psalm 104. These psalms portray God as a gardener/caretaker who watches over the rest of creation just as God watches over human creatures.

In the Book of Job, chapters 38-39 also serve as a rebuke to the notion that the natural world exists to serve humans. Whether these chapters are read as a divine tongue-lashing directed to Job or as a divine parental love letter to the wild and free non-human creatures, the message is the same: humans are not the center of the created order, simply a part of it.

### Quotes and Resources:

- Bill McKibben, "God's Taunt," Riverside Church, April 29, 2013,
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geIni\\_BwjGw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geIni_BwjGw)
- Shai Held, "Created in God's Image" (12-minute audio) found at
  - <https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/created-gods-image>
- "The ecologists have run into a paradox worthy of theological investigation: The extent of our interference obligates humans to exercise what they call 'active management' - in the language of this biblical poem, 'mastery among' creatures... 'the basic meaning of the verb is not to rule; the word actually denotes the travelling around of the shepherd with his flock.' Thus, the language of Genesis 1 acknowledges the unique power of *Homo sapiens*, yet without separating us from the other creatures." Ellen Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, pg. 55.
- "It would seem that conformity to the image of God is the single enabling condition for the exercise of 'mastery' among creatures." Ellen Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, pg. 55.
- "Life created in God's image is meant to conform, with other forms of life, into a single harmonious order." Ellen Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, pg. 57.
- "What is *stated* in Genesis 1:28 is that humans play a special role, both powerful and responsible, in maintenance of the order that God has established. The earth may be 'conquered,' that is, claimed for God's purposes and rendered hospitable to the whole created order. Ellen Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, pg. 62.
- "God is describing a world without people—a world that existed long before people, and that seems to have its own independent meaning. ....The first meaning, I think, of God's speech to Job is that we are a part of the whole order of creation—simply a part." Bill McKibben,

*The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 36-37.

**Sermon 3**—The New Creation is here and now. *Isaiah 65:17* (or *Isaiah 11:1-11*), *2 Corinthians 5:17*

Oftentimes what prevents Christians who do love the natural world from seeing creation care as an important part of their faith is the idea that caring for this world doesn't matter because in the end, it will be left behind. The focus of these next two sermons can begin to give the church language for seeing this world as the place where God will accomplish ultimate salvation and restoration.

These Scripture options help the pastor introduce to the congregation the idea of a new creation as something that takes place on earth. *Isaiah 65* explicitly says that God is creating a new earth. *Isaiah 11* (especially vs. 6-9) paint a picture of what that new creation might look like.

*2 Cor 5:17* helps make the point that for those who are in Christ, we are actually already living in the new creation here and now. Encourage your congregation to think about ways they see glimpses of the new creation already in this world. Consider reflecting on the line of the Lord's Prayer "thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," to reassure your people that you are not introducing a brand new idea to them.

#### **Quotes:**

- "Christian theologians of the early church regularly linked creation with salvation, and salvation with the embodied, practical ministries of Jesus."
- "Every phase of Jesus's life - his birth and baptism, the performance of his miracles, his institution of the Eucharist, and his cross, resurrection, and ascension - had cosmic significance pointing to a new world." Norman Wirbza, *From Nature to Creation*, pg. 22.
- "In Jesus's fleshly body the sin-caused divide between Creator and creature is healed." -Norman Wirbza, *From Nature to Creation*, pg. 22.
- "God became a human creature so that in Jesus God could show us how to better imagine and fully become creatures ourselves." Norman Wirbza, *From Nature to Creation*, pg. 23.
- "The salvation which is here spoken of is not what is frequently understood by that word, the going to heaven, eternal happiness. It is

not the soul's going to paradise, termed by our Lord 'Abraham's bosom.' It is not a blessing which lies on the other side of death, or (as we usually speak) in the other world. . . . . It is a present thing." John Wesley, Sermon 43, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," I.1, *Sermons* (Outler), p 372.

**Sermon 4**—The home of God is on earth. Colossians 1:15-20, Revelation 21:1-5

Having set the stage in Sermon 3, in this sermon the preacher points to places in Scripture that say a) Christ's mission is to reconcile *all things* to God, and b) "the home of God is among mortals." Whether your congregation would appreciate this comment is left to your judgement, but in reflecting on Rev 21:3, Norman Wirzba says, "For those who plan to float up to heaven to spend eternity with God, they will have to settle for waving at God as God makes his way down to earth to be with us."

These two passages set up two important questions: "If Christ's mission is to reconcile all things to God, what part do we as the church have to play in that?" and "If the home of God is on earth, among mortals, how are we called to care for this earth in the here and now?"

**Quotes:**

- "Jesus is not only the Savior of the whole world. He is also the Creator. All things in heaven and on earth are created *in* and *through* him. They exist *for* him." That means that everything exists only because it has a place in the divine love Jesus made incarnate in his ministries." Norman Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, pg. 20.
- "Creation, we might say, flows *from* Jesus at its beginning, flows *through* Jesus as it is healed, and flows *to* Jesus as it is fulfilled." - Norman Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, pg. 22.
- "To become a follower of Jesus was not to wait for the time when souls could be freed from bodies and plucked into an ethereal heaven. It was instead to see oneself as invited and inspired to join with Christ in the healing of the whole world." Norman Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, pg. 24.