

Luke 10:25-37; 10/21/18

Who Is My Neighbor in a Climate Threatened World?

Pastor Ellen: Today, we think about creation and ask the question, “Who is my neighbor in a climate threatened world?” The concept of *environmental stewardship* originates with the first of the creation stories, in which God gives humans dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the animals of the land (Gen 1:1–2:4). Traditionally, Christians have distorted the mandate of “exercising dominion” to mean that creation was made for human beings and that we have a right to dominate and exploit creation for our own wants and needs. This has led to incalculable abuses of nature. But, what we now know is that the Hebrew word for *dominion* does not mean “to dominate” or “to exploit.” Rather, it means “to take responsibility for,” as a ruler would be responsible to assure the well-being of those in the realm.

Natalie Dingledine: In the first creation story in Genesis, human beings were created last, not as the so-called “crown of creation,” but in order to exercise responsibility for the well-being of the garden Earth. According to Genesis 1, exercising responsibility as part of God’s creation is the main reason humans were created. Therefore, being stewards of creation is foundational to what it means to be human. Caring for creation is not an add-on, not a sideline, not related just to part of our calling. It

represents our proper human relationship to Earth. This portrayal puts human beings squarely in a caretaker position in regard to environmental stewardship.

The all-embracing vision of God for creation is violated, when there is injustice by humans against humans. The biblical authors know the close relationship between the ways people exploit Earth and the ways people exploit the poor. In the Bible, when people are oppressed, the rest of creation suffers too – the land languishes and the grains fail (Jer 2:7; Isa 24:4-7; Joel 2:2-20). We are called to steward resources not only in ways that generate sustainability for Earth’s resources but also in ways that sustain life for the poor and vulnerable. In biblical terms, we are to act out of God’s compassion for “orphans, widows and the resident aliens among us.” We are called to care for the least and the lost – human and non-human alike – just as Jesus “came to seek out and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). And, therefore, in light of our calling to be good stewards of creation, on this day we ask, “Who is my neighbor in a world threatened by a changing climate?”

Jack Dingedine: Climate change is wreaking havoc on our world, and on our nation. In the past eighteen months alone, we have witnessed devastating hurricanes on the Gulf Coast, Puerto Rico, and the Atlantic

coastline. There have been incredible droughts and record-breaking wildfires in the West, destroying lands and forests and polluting the air: for a few days this year the pollution level in Seattle from these fires was even greater than that in Beijing. In 2017, the cost to the US economy from climate related disasters exceeded 300 billion dollars for the first time, and we may exceed that amount in 2018. Just imagine the good that could be accomplished for our nation with 300 billion dollars.

A recent report by an intergovernmental panel on climate change describes the dire consequences of a warming planet on its inhabitants. From 2008 to 2015, more than [100 million people](#) were displaced by floods, 60 million by storms, and nearly 1 million by extreme temperatures. Over the past four decades, the rate of such dislocations has increased by 60 percent. The number of likely “environmental migrants” or “environmental refugees” from climate changes is projected to be [50 million to 200 million](#). Again, in light of our calling to be good stewards of creation, on this day we ask, “Who is my neighbor in a climate threatened world?”

TULA Nagasala: In many parts of the world, water is scarce, often due to the impact of climate change and severe droughts, and what is available is increasingly hazardous to drink due to the toxic nature of nuclear energy, fossil fuel production, and the impact of extractive

industries like mining and logging on sources of water. In many developing countries (including Tanzania where I grew up), poor wastewater, animal waste and sewage management are the main sources of contamination in domestic water sources. The effect of climate change has a deeper negative impact to many communities due to lack of resources, funding to help with development and appropriate management. Unpredictable rainfall patterns, too much rainfall in a short time and extended dry seasons create water scarcity problems and food scarcity especially because of high dependence of rainfed agriculture. Lack of water availability always leads to poor water quality which has serious health impacts on families especially women and children. Water-borne diseases are a major cause of maternal and infant mortality in the world. These challenges affect women physically and even socially because in many cultures of the developing world, women are responsible for water collection, along with other chores that are related to taking care of their families.

Water sustains the environment and supports livelihoods, but when it is scarce or polluted, food production is disrupted, and people migrate. Migration, in turn, generates conflict and violence, as in much of the Middle East and South Asia, and sometimes war, as in the case of both Syria and

South Sudan. Again, in light of our calling to be good stewards of creation, on this day we ask, “Who is my neighbor in a climate threatened world?”

As we look at the impact of a changing climate, we need to face ourselves and recognize that we have been ruthless and unjust stewards of Earth. We too often place profits above people; we put security for ourselves above security for all; and we act as if the world is there for our use alone. As climate change takes place, it is already impacting the most vulnerable in this world. And, as climate change continues to progress, many who are the most vulnerable will no longer be able to live in parts of the world that will come increasingly dry and arid, in places where land becomes submerged in sea water, and in places where heat will rise to unlivable temperatures. Ecological disasters have the greatest impact on the most vulnerable people – third world countries, the poor, people of color, the sick, and the elderly. These also happen to be the ones with the least resources to respond.

This church, Faith Lutheran, is a great example of a body of Christ that is always there to help our neighbors. Because of the big support from this Faith family, today, Naitolia village in Tanzania has a reliable source of water that has been constructed properly and it is capable to sustain climate change by storing water all year round. The impact that this church

has made in that community in Tanzania is huge. I speak as someone who grew up with water scarcity issues and who understands the frustration. We have a responsibility to discern our immoral and destructive ways, confess them as sin, and turn to a new way of living. Again, as Christians, called to be stewards of all creation, on this day we ask, “Who is my neighbor in a climate threatened world?”

Pastor Ellen: Making wise choices as God’s Earth-keepers may involve sacrifice on our part as we seek to live a simpler lifestyle and walk lightly on Earth. In our Christian life, the key to making our world sustainable is viewing our change of behavior and our sacrifices as acts of love and kindness toward all creation – toward other people; toward other creatures; and toward the well-being of land, sea, and air. By doing these things as part of our spiritual discipline, we exercise our vocation as stewards of creation not out of fear, guilt, shame, outrage, or despair. Rather, what makes this journey sacred is that we act with a gratitude nourished by the fountain of God’s grace, an inexhaustible source of “living water” that will sustain us for a lifetime of loving creation, and that will enable us to be good stewards of creation with hope and joy!

So, as we continue to ponder our call to care for creation as a sacred trust on behalf of the entire Earth-community, we must be willing to go

beyond our own wants and desires in order to see creation through the compassionate eyes of the God who empowers the weak and is always walking with the most vulnerable. Again, we need to continually ask, “Who is my neighbor in a climate threatened world?”

Let us pray: Gracious and loving God, give us your heart for creation. Give us your heart for the diverse people of this world. Give us your heart for the most vulnerable people in this world. And, give us your heart for the nations of this world. Amen.