

**We are Managers of the God-Given Created Order:
Effective or Ineffective Managers?**

Sermon notes by the Rev. Arnold A. Bush, Priest in Charge, Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, Tallassee, AL 36078, 10.7.2012, Stewardship of Creation Sunday, nearest Feast of Francis of Assisi, October 4.

Texts: Genesis 2:15-24; Psalm 8; Hebrews 1:1-4,2:5-12; John 6:1-14

I. Introduction

- Water in our homes: clean water for bathing, drinking, food preparation
- Trace the course of dirty water from shower, washer, commode, a septic tank or city sewer system to a pump station
- Most of us heat or cool our homes from Alagasco or AL Power
- We breathed clean air walking from our automobile to worship
- How many looked at the sky this am? This week I noticed smoke stacks in Birmingham.
- As a citizen do you feel recycling of paper, aluminum cans, plastics, glass is helpful or unhelpful?
- Do you know where the landfills are in Elmore and Montgomery Counties? Any controversial stories about landfills in Central AL?
- Have you ever taken a night walk to see the North Star, Big Dipper or Little Dipper?
- Are you familiar with many ingredients in processed food as compared to organic foods? When Patricia spoke at the Adult Class on Mother's Day she increased my awareness of processed food
- Have you ever seen a "fish kill" in an AL stream caused by polluted water?
- Do you consider yourself informed on global warming and environmental issues?

All of these statements have to do with the Created Order we touch, eat, observe, enjoy, that with sustains human life. We are the managers of the clean air, clean water supply, contamination of the soil under subdivisions or contamination of soils where row crops are grown. This is a sermon on how God has created us to be managers over this created order.

II. The Biblical Record in Genesis, Psalm 8, & Consecration Prayer

You may open your Pew Bibles to Genesis 1:26:

"He made human kind in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air... cattle, wild animals, over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth". Genesis 1:28 reads: "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".

I like the Jerusalem Bible translation: "let them be MASTERS OVER THE FISH, BIRDS", ETC. We have dominion, supreme authority over the created order.

Look at the last 6 verses in the psalm:

"You have make him but little lower than the angels; you adorn him with glory and honor; you give him mastery over the works in your hands; you put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, even the wild breasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and whatsoever walks in the paths of the sea."

These verses say to you and me in Central Alabama that we are the managers of creation. We have been given responsibility and authority over the animals, the plants that produce oxygen in the air, the plants we eat, the water source consumption or irrigation, the fuels pulled out from deep in the earth. We are managers! Sometimes good managers and sometimes poor managers. In my study for this sermon, I considered two things about caring for the environment.

1. The role and the responsibility of the individuals and organizations in our nation. Individual and Corporate responsibilities.
2. The laws and regulations passed by federal, state and local governments that will affect the atmosphere, water, fuel sources, the carbon footprint of individuals, and the industries that impact the environment.

From what I have read, caring for the environment will take individuals, organizations and legislation. This sermon is primarily about how we as individuals and as a congregation care for the environment. If I mention legislation and regulation, remember this is my perspective and I realize some present will disagree with me. The first phrase in the Eucharistic Prayer C is “At God’s command all things came to be: the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns and the planets in their courses, and THIS FRAGILE EARTH, OUR ISLAND HOME. Later, the petition states: “AND YOU BLESSED US WITH MEMORY, REASON AND SKILL. YOU MADE US THE RULERS OF CREATION.”

Our “island home” seems like a scene out of a science fiction movie.

III. Metaphor of a Large Space Ship

Three years ago our cruise through the Panama Canal docked in San Diego. Before getting a flight back to home, we had a three-hour tour of the very large aircraft carrier Midway. As we toured the ship, I recall them saying this is like a city on the ocean with 5,000 sailors. There were laundry rooms, barbershops, recreation areas, sleeping quarters, several places for meals, and a hospital for surgery. As I walked around the very large ship, it reminded me of an image from C.S. Lewis. Suppose you were on a very large space ship traveling for several years with 500 inhabitants. The air and water source would have to be purified. There is a need for sustainable food source, a way to eliminate waste. Regulations about garbage, solid waste, not over using the water and electrical power. A code of conducts’ description of ethical standards for all inhabitants and law enforcement with a judicial system. Seeing ourselves as one planet in the solar system may be helpful to this fragile earth and its environment that sustains human existence.

IV. Implications of Jesus’ feeding of the 5,000

1. Jesus at the Sea of Galilee, also Sea of Tiberius: 693.1 feet below sea level. Plentiful streams flowing into its waters. Plentiful fish for Jesus’ disciples to make a living. It is a large fresh water lake shaped like a heart, 13 miles long N to S, and 8 miles wide with a depth of 141 feet. It is 33 miles in circumference. It is the lowest fresh water on the earth. It has cliff to the NE, the Golan Heights. It is much deeper than Lake Martin. It is part of the Jordan River that empties into it from the North. The River exits to the south that goes to the Dead Sea. If you were in a boat in the center of the Lake, you would look at the Golan Heights 2,000 feet high to the east and then turn to the western sky to see vegetation of trees and open fields. Historian Josephus

reports a thriving fishing industry with 230 boats on the Lake. During the time of Jesus there were no powerboats, no oil spills, no sewage waste going into the lake, no pesticides polluting the water. Just an abundance of springs and small villages around the lake. In the past few years, according to Wikipedia, the lakes been drawn down during droughts threatening the freshwater ecosystem. It has threatened the loss of some types of fish, and the Lake has almost changed to salt water due to the springs of salt in the bottom of the lake. So citizens of Israel and Syria have to ration fresh water during droughts.

In order to keep our lakes clean, laws are often enacted to prevent sewage from seeping into the fresh water through septic tanks. For 9 years I lived on the Ross Barnett Reservoir, a lake 6 miles wide and 25 miles long. As people build lakefront homes, many complained about the requirement to hook up to the public sewer system. Let's keep our lakes and streams clean.

2. "Jesus asked Philip, How are we going to feed so many people." "Philip said six months wages would not but buy enough bread to feed them." Is not Jesus always asking his followers how they are going to feed them? Last May, we were having 25 to 30 guests coming to the Beans and Rice Ministry on 3rd Saturday. Jesus was asking us, how are you going to give food to those who come to Beans and Rice, and where shall we store the food for more? Last month we had 53 families. The answer to Jesus was, we will become an agency of the Montgomery Area Food Bank, where we can purchase food for 19 cents a pound. I was in South GA for 9 years in Tifton where the Agricultural Experiment was located. Could not Jesus be asking the same question to agriculture research professors as they visited some of the countries in Africa? How are you going to feed the people in Kenya, Tanzania, Angalia, Nairobi, the countries in Southern Africa? We are going to teach farming in their schools and bring students to the University of GA and Auburn Ag schools. Members of the Tifton Rotary Club described how they increased the yield of food crops in African countries. Remember Jesus is asking the members of this congregation, how are you going to feed those who come to your door on third Saturday? Is he asking us to offer seminars on growing gardens for food?
3. In John 6:99, Andrew said, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish." There is a boy here willing to share his lunch box. Think about this. A BOY HERE WILLING TO OPEN HIS LUNCH BOX. There is a middle class family on our street willing to recycle. There is a family willing to cut down on their energy and water consumption. There is a family in Tallassee willing to adjust their thermostats in the summer and winter. There is a family with a garden of veggies and compost living off their garden and giving vegetables away. There is a neighborhood block party several times a year where there is dancing, singing and eating. They are having more fun than going away for a long weekend.
4. There is a church willing to welcome all sorts of folks and they have a spirit to care for the CREATION. At Wednesday night suppers there is no Styrofoam, no plastic plates, no throwaways. They have a community garden and an active Green Team. There is a church here that has a cleanup day on the Cahaba River three times a year. They are informed about the Forever Wild land in AL as they go on canoeing and camping trips several weekends a year.

5. There is a church here willing to send teams to Habitat Blitz Days several miles away and send teams to undeveloped countries to start Living Water Wells of small villages. These Living Wells Mission Teams in the USA Presbyterian Church provide pure water for 100's of small undeveloped countries in Central America.
6. While Zoe and I were at a 5-day Road Scholar Seminar, formerly called Elderhostel, in Little Rock, AR we toured the International Headquarters for the Heifer International. First the four-story building was self-sufficient in water, electric energy, and waste treatment. I was impressed with the large windows that let the heat and light of the sun into the offices, solar panels on the roof and a pond for raising fish. This was the green building for the 21st century. There is a church that has helped a small village in the central region of Nepal in chronic poverty by sending a veterinarian to train the village how to care for the goats, heifers, pigs, chickens, and water buffalo.
7. There is a professor at UAB and member of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, James McClintock, who shared information in his lunch box. He made 14 expeditions in 30 years to Antarctica. In his book, he is willing to share his marine biology data from Antarctica. He tracks the transformation of the continent caused by climate change. He weaves a narrative about what he witnessed with his own eyes. Speaking of climate change on our planet, I was discussing with one of my relatives who does not believe climate is taking place. This relative thinks all this is a BIG Lie. I asked, suppose these scientists were half correct about climate change. I said, even if 50% was correct in their predictions, we would still need to make changes to slow down the rate of climate change.

Going back to the metaphor of the Giant Space Ship, do we still want to procrastinate, just kick the can down the road and do nothing to stop the gradual warming trends within the Space Ship?

V. We each have a Lunch Box.

We have all been given skills and behaviors in our lunch boxes. Are we willing to share the behaviors that bring care to our environments, such as recycling, giving food assistance to the poor, consuming less fuel and electric power, less polluting of the atmosphere, participating in groups that keeps abreast of laws that affect the environment?

VI. Jesus took the Two Fish and Five Barley loaves and gave THANKS.

Matthew's account reads: "*He took the loaves of bread and fish, looking up to heaven, he GAVE THANKS and broke the loaves.*"

Let us do a little self-examination this morning testing our barometer of gratitude. One way to increase our gratitude is to thank Jesus for all the little things in our life. Wednesday I met with my Cursillo Reunion Group. One member of my group had been traveling for the past 8 weeks, and the check-in was, "Arnold how have you been the last two months." I said life is so great. I am so thankful for God blessings. I have seen a lot of softball and soccer games, even in Chicago; I play tennis two mornings a week at Mt. Brook H.S.; I have fun being the pastor of Epiphany in

Tallasse; I love my immediate neighbors; I have attended three college football games; we laugh a lot in the Tuesday study groups; I have been faithful to my Wellness Commitments for 5 weeks. Next Saturday have 8 persons help me do landscaping at the Greater Birmingham Ministries Building in downtown B'ham. I am so grateful. Another way we show our gratitude is to properly use or take care of what we have been given. Here is an example: A teenager inherited an older car from a great-grand parent. The car was willed to the teen, but after a few weeks he stopped driving it. He did not like the green color, and it was a large Lincoln, not sporty. He preferred to use his mother's sporty car. He seldom washed or changed the oil. His neglected the car, thus he was not grateful or thankful for this car. What about our brains. God has given us the ability to think, reason, reflect, and learn new information. Sometimes we neglect to use them in critical thinking, learning something new every week, thinking seriously about God's will for us. If we neglect to take care of or use our brains, is not that an indication we are not thankful God has given us a human brain?

VII. They were filled, they were satisfied, and they had as much as they wanted.

Maybe the point here is when we let Jesus feed our souls and allow Him to dwell in our hearts, there is a sense of satisfaction, a sense of contentment in our life. As one proverb said: We do not love what we do not have; but we love what we have. Jesus allows color to come into our lives. We enjoy music more; we enjoy relationships

VIII. Jesus told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing is lost."

They cleaned up after themselves. Followers of Jesus clean up after themselves. For example, changing the oil in my car, reprimanded by David my chemical engineer son. My confession. \$2.00 fine for recycling.

Sales tax vote to create drainage ponds on SR 20 to stop pollution from entering the bayous and Choctawhatchee Bay.