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So I'll let you in on the secret. This sermon is about the environment. This should come to no surprise to many of you who know me well. However, I approach you today not from a political aspect, or from a judgmental aspect. Instead I come to you simply as a member of your community, a citizen of the world, and a biological being who likes things the way they are (healthy) and wants to see my world and community preserved for some years. Recently it has become clear to me that matters of the environmental policy are very relevant to each individual, and each community, including the community of the church. So, that being said. I hope that you'll lend me your ears and hearts for a small bit to talk about this issue which has landed very close to mine.

Mud. One of the things I remember most vividly about my childhood is the fact that I loved to play in the mud. Although I'm sure my mother wasn't as happy about the concept (although I don't specifically remember her ever objecting to it (perhaps I really am my mother's daughter)) I would spend hours making mud pies with my friends or alone in my back yard. As I got older (I also got a little cleaner), I continued to spend many hours outside. My hometown in northwest SD lacked the normal movie theater and mall, but instead contained resources that were much greater than these things. Instead, I spent my time outdoors doing sports, riding horse, fishing, camping, attempting to catch animals, making forts, and playing games. Every spring, baby turkeys, deer, and other animals would emerge—and I always noticed it because I was outside *all the time*.

Needless to say, these experiences that I had as a child influence me greatly, even today. Although I've lived in Sioux Falls for four years, and in many ways consider it more of a "home" than my hometown, I still every so often feel a longing for the immersion in nature that I had at that time. When the geese fly overhead, for instance, I often feel comforted that they still carry on with their routine outside of the city, even in the midst of the paved streets and developed neighborhoods around me.

My experiences outside as a child might explain why I care about the environment, and its preservation. I feel a deep connection to the earth when I think about the time I spent looking at the sky, or listening to the birds call to each other. However, I realize that this isn't always convincing. "It's nice," you might be thinking "that she feels good when she's in

un-human-developed territory. But what does that have to do with us? Why should we care?" To answer these questions within the context of faith communities, I think it is important to look at the texts of this faith community (as well as perhaps from others) and the fundamental beliefs that we hold about God and how his followers are to act.

In Genesis 3: 19, it reads,

¹⁹By the sweat of your face

You will eat bread,

Till you (^U)return to the ground,

Because (^V)from it you were taken;

For you are dust,

And to dust you shall return."

I think that this passage illustrates a good point. "For you are dust, and to dust you shall return." I think that this passage talks specifically to just how tied to the earth are. It, pretty accurately, describes us as dust. Now, from a biological standpoint, we are (and Dr. Gubbels, my physiology professor would be proud of me when I say) 65% Oxygen, 18% Carbon, 10% Hydrogen, 3% Nitrogen, 1.5% Calcium, as well as small percentages of a number of elements. These elements come from the world around us—the things we eat. We are not so unlike dust, which has organic material (like carbon) and other elements like Calcium and Nitrogen in it. We are perhaps even more like air, which is made up primarily of nitrogen, oxygen, and even some carbon dioxide. Learning that we are not actually so different from (quote quote) the environment is important in recognizing our actual dependence and close connection to it.

In case you had doubts about this connection, however, I can also think of a few other ways in which we are connected to the world around us. Perhaps in ways that we don't even think about as we go about our lifestyles every day.

Every day, I eat sugar. I'm assuming (although I'm also assuming that most of you eat less sugar than I do) that you do too. This sugar has, for as long as I remember, miraculously appeared on the shelves of stores for me to consume. I know it comes from a plant—but because this plant is renewable (unlike say, oil), I don't really think that there's a problem with it's massive distribution. However, if I told you that this sugar, the stuff that you and I are eating every day, is contributing to Global Climate Change, it might change the way you view that sugar on the shelf.

2009 was the first year ever that more people lived in cities than in rural areas. All the predictions were that, once this happened, there would be less deforestation in many areas due to lessening pressure put on forests to maintain people. Theoretically, this would cut down on slash and burn farming etc. This included Brazil. However, what the models didn't take into account was globalization. Instead of lessening the strain on the environment, globalization has led to a larger strain on these forests. In addition, there are also now less people to farm in these areas—causing them to actually use slash and burn techniques to an even greater extent. Slash and burn farming, consequently, is related to GCC in that tropical forests are one of the largest carbon sinks (carbon absorbers) in the world. By burning these areas, this is being eliminated (also irreplaceable forest because the soil quickly erodes following.)

I'm not saying that we should stop buying so much sugar (although we perhaps should). Instead, I'm simply saying that we need to think about the effect that our actions have on the grand scale. We are deeply connected to a large number of issues, which span the globe. These connections, which we need to be aware of, are important specifically to the church for many reasons. The ways in which we're impacting these large-scale environmental problems impacts not only the environment upon which we're dependent, but also impacts other people who are also dependent on this environment—many of them in a much more intimate sense than we are.

One of the roles of the church has always been to care for people. In the reading for today, Phillipians 2:4-8, it states, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." Global Climate Change, resulting from CO₂ emissions, is predicted to affect the whole world with drought, flooding, and increasing storm intensity. Just recently, I read an article in the Argus leader that described a study in which Methane was found to be leaking from the Arctic Ocean floor into the atmosphere. Normally, this process takes thousands of years, but it's being accelerated now due to higher temperatures which are melting the permafrost that covered it. Methane is known to be an even larger greenhouse gas than CO₂—this could accelerate GCC overall and lead to a positive feedback cycle where even more warming leads to more Methane release.

Global Climate change, as it affects the land, is expected to hit developing nations and indigenous groups the hardest. Already the poorest, they will now have to cope with disappearing land (as in the Maldives) and changing conditions for crop-growing and water supply. Even besides GCC, fossil fuels cause respiratory problems and health threats to people in high ff burning areas. In any case, the Church will have to think about this and how to react—caring for those who are already being affected by GCC etc. Further, I think that if we in developed nations are causing GCC through pollution, we need to think about in which ways we can stop this before the impact on these already marginalized groups is felt even stronger. The church, in filling its role as servant, may need to think about the environment as it thinks about how to fill its role as a servant and advocate.

Finally, it may be helpful to look at the role that humans fill as caretakers of the earth in the context of biblical texts. First, I'd like to tell you one last story. Last semester, I took Plant Ecology. As part of this class, we did a number of readings on the Endangered Species Act, which protects by law a number of endangered animals. This protection extended to instances in which the government itself was restricted from building, etc. in areas that would lead to increased endangerment of these species. I was shocked, however, to learn that there was 1 group, nicknamed the "God Squad" that could come together to override this protection in the name of economic development. Thus, in California, for example, the God Squad ruled that the Klamath Project, an irrigation project, could continue in 2001, despite the fact that this would lead to the extinction of Lost River sucker and shortnosed sucker, two species of endangered fish.

In Genesis 1, humans are proclaimed to be the rulers over all creation, made in the likeness of God. Genesis 1:28 states "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." Traditionally, this passage has been taken to mean literally "rule," which seems to make the earth simply a possession for the use of man. While this is part of the story, (the Hebrew word means to dominate), a revisiting of this story might be helpful with "care for" or "enter into a relationship" being used instead of "rule" which may not describe the full context of this word. After all, the agricultural system of the time would have had 6 years of cultivation of the earth, followed by a seventh during which the earth was allowed to "rest." This process represents a relationship with the earth that was close. Another aspect of this creation story was the fact that the animals also have permission to "be fruitful and multiply." When we begin to see that the earth, and it's animals also were part of creation—an important and respected

part--we begin to look at a different view of the relationship between man and environment. This relationship, one which values exchange and mutual respect between the two, is perhaps a better way to approach the relationship human and earth.

Matthew 6:25-26 reads, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't there more to life than food and more to the body than clothing? 26 Look at the birds in the sky: They do not sow, or reap, or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you more valuable than they are?"

Although this passage does acknowledge humans as important, it also talks about God caring for the birds—God fills the role not only of creator, but also sustainer. If we are “made in the image of God” perhaps we should also consider our role as caretaker and sustainer, which moves beyond the simple “ruler,” or even less so “dominator” approach that we seem to have taken, and moves us into a closer relationship with the earth. As far as always choosing humans and economics before other creatures, we will then have to take into account their respect, and our own duty to act as sustainers towards.

Wrapping up, I want to tell you of the insight a friend recently gave me. She said to me, “It will be this way. It will be this way until you say no, I’m never going to do this again.” This applies to so many things that I’ve done in my life, things that I now see I must stop—it will continue to be this way until we decide to stop driving our cars. It will be this way until we refuse outright to buy another plastic product, or throw another plastic bag away. It will continue to be this way until we learn to live within the limits of the earth, simply, and without polluting and exploiting it. It will continue to be this way until we cultivate our consciensness to the effects of our actions, and it will continue to be this way until we realize the power that we have as individuals to change the things around us that we don’t think are right. Hopefully, however, it will not have to be this way until our lakes are dry, our land is polluted, our animals are extinct, and our people are pushed to the very ends of their means—trying to survive in places with drought or flooding or extreme storms.

In conclusion, I’d like to leave you with a saying. As I ran through numerous possibilities for readings for my senior sermon, this one seemed to grab my attention—and represents much of what I’d like to leave you with.

I have come to terms with the future.

From this day onward, I will walk easy on the earth.

Plant trees. Kill no living things. Live in harmony with all creatures.

I will restore the earth where I am. Use no more of its resources than I need.

And listen, listen to what it is telling me.