

Scripture:
Genesis 13:1-17

Walk Lightly

BB Warfield stated the following: A glass window stands before us. We raise our eyes and see the glass; we note its quality, and observe its defects; we speculate on its composition. Or we look straight through it on the great prospect of land and sea and sky beyond. So there are two ways of looking at the world. We may see the world and absorb ourselves in the wonders of nature. That is the scientific way. Or we may look right through the world and see God behind it. That is the religious way. The scientific way of looking at the world is not wrong any more than the glass-manufacturer's way of looking at the window. This way of looking at things has its very important uses. Nevertheless the window was placed there not to be looked at but to be looked through; and the world has failed of its purpose unless it too is looked through and the eye rests not on it but on its God. The Glass that lies before us begs the question, "What does it mean to worship a creator?"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJuRjy9k7GA> On 23 September 2014, 26 year old poet Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, from the Marshall Islands, addressed the Opening Ceremony of the UN Secretary-General's Climate Summit.

In thinking through how to approach today's sermon I came across a story of sheep by Mike Anderson. Here is what he said "My pastor in Austin, Texas hated sheep. I don't remember why, just that he hated sheep, which is pretty ironic for a pastor, in light of the many biblical allusions to sheep and shepherds. I remember one of Pastor Karli's sermons in which he described the relationship between shepherds and sheep. In addition to protecting the sheep from predators and the environment, shepherds also protect sheep from themselves. Unlike cows, which only eat the blades of grass, sheep tend to eat the roots. Once the roots are consumed, the grass no longer grows back, and both the plant and the animal's future is put in jeopardy. It is the shepherd's job to rotate the flock, before they overgraze the pasture."¹

Now before we spend too much time criticizing the 'dumb sheep' let's stop for a minute and think about how we might overgraze our pastures. Sheep may need human shepherds to assist them in keeping their land sustainable but I wonder who is assisting the humans with this endeavour.

What about all of the things we humans do to our environment: pollution, unsustainable agriculture, and reliance upon unsustainable energy sources. All of the things we do to

¹ Anderson, Mike "Eating the Roots" Luther Place Memorial Church, Washington, D.C.

undermine the earth's ability to sustain us. In the last week I have heard, the good shepherd, calling out, "Humans, stop eating the roots."

I heard it through a video post a selection of moderators of the United Church of Canada made, I read it in Moderator Gary Patterson's blog, I saw it through 300,000 marchers in New York City. I heard a Holy voice calling "Human's stop eating the roots" through the 26 year old poet Kathy Jetnil-Kijine, and through a speech to the UN Climate Change summit by Leonardo DiCaprio and what about the move by the world to end Global poverty by 2030. Social media screamed it out this week louder than I have ever heard. And I wonder if the shepherd is asking "Will the sheep hear my voice?"

The scripture passage Carol read for us is rich in possibilities for the context of environmental issues and the theme of walking lightly on the land. Within the story we have a land that is overburdened ("the land could not support both of them living together," verse 6) and a people contentious and divided—tensions that are reflected in our own time. Issues of land use and abuse continue to bring brother and sister, parent and child, uncle and nephew into conflict. Our human nature of greed is not a new one, but it is one that is destroying our world, and it is time for us to act.

In today's passage Lot, the greedy one, claims the best for himself and in so doing sets the stage for future tragedy.

And yet while Abraham walks on the land that God has given him he claims it for his own still, while remembering that this land was a gift from God, to be held in trust for future generations. It's an image repeated in today's world when a farmer faithfully walks the land, checking fields, kneeling on the earth to discover if the seed has yet sprouted—if there will be another's seasons harvest.

There are so many things we do as individuals to unbalance the system and perhaps this is a good time to think through the reminder of when we too participate in the destruction of the earth.

Mike Anderson wrote "Over the years, I have become so dependent upon air conditioning that I can't sleep when it's over 72 degrees. Rather than adapting or migrating to a cooler climate, I choose to eat the roots. When we turn on the television, every five minutes we see some new medical supplement, meant to make our lives better. Yet often times, this is not medicine curing us of a disease. We are turning medicine into a convenience. That overmedication is leading to resistant viral strains; strains that now show up in birds. When we clear trees to build a house, not just the trees on the plot, but the trees which might get in the way of our dumpsters and trucks and make construction a little less convenient, are we eating the roots? When we build 3,000, 4,000, even 6,000 sq ft homes, taking more energy to build, more energy to maintain, and

more energy to furnish, are we eating the roots? Every time I turn around, we are trying to shape and change the world to make it more convenient for us, and we are eating the roots.”²

Now, many of you may not know this but I love my technology. So you will not hear me suggesting that every new technology is evil; certainly, we have made a lot of gains in sustaining life, but sometimes our steps forward don’t seem to be forward at all. Sometimes, we get so focused on controlling the environment that we are disturbing the balance that sustains us. Along with Abraham and the prophets before us we are called to care for our world. When we get so focused on our own comfort that we destroy whole species creating our safe havens I believe we have stopped listening to the Shepherd.

I can guarantee there are some of you out there who live a better example of a sustainable lifestyle than I do. But I have heard the Shepherd call this week and I too will listen and take some more careful steps in my life. As a person of faith in this generation there are a lot of causes we can throw ourselves behind and this to many is just one more cause but I would echo DiCaprio in stating this is no small thing.

“Every week, we’re seeing new and undeniable climate events, evidence that accelerated climate change is here now. We know that droughts are intensifying, our oceans are warming and acidifying, with methane plumes rising up from beneath the ocean floor. We are seeing extreme weather events, increased temperatures, and the West Antarctic and Greenland ice-sheets melting at unprecedented rates, decades ahead of scientific projections.

None of this is rhetoric, and none of it is hysteria. It is fact. The scientific community knows it, Industry and governments know it, even the United States military knows it. The chief of the US navy’s Pacific command, admiral Samuel Locklear, recently said that climate change is our single greatest security threat.

My Friends, this body – perhaps more than any other gathering in human history – now faces that difficult task. You can make history ... or be vilified by it.

To be clear, this is not about just telling people to change their light bulbs or to buy a hybrid car. This disaster has grown BEYOND the choices that individuals make. This is now about our industries, and governments around the world taking decisive, large-scale action.”³

One flock will not protect the roots if others follow along, licking their chops, waiting to eat what we leave behind. Protecting the roots that exist is not enough; we must reseed. We need to make the investment to start planting new roots.

² IBID

³ <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/sep/23/leonardo-dicaprio-un-climate-change-speech-new-york>

“God appointed us as stewards of the earth, not so we could exploit the earth’s resources for our own greed, but to protect it and keep it in balance and harmony. We need to look no farther than Christ’s example to see the truth. Jesus consumed only what was needed...He rejected outward signs of status or material wealth. Jesus teaches us to simplify, forsaking earthly wealth and comfort...If we have faith in God and listen to God’s word, we will recognize the shepherd’s voice. We will strive to lead a healthy, sustainable, and godly life. And though we will often fall short, God’s grace will lift us up and renew us. And this is the beauty of the relationship between faith, grace, and the environment. We don’t have to do everything, but we must do something. It is beyond our human capability to do everything, but our faith moves us to do something. We must do something...

Anderson wrote “Many of us get discouraged and overwhelmed with the expansiveness of social injustice in the world. Genocide in Dhafur. Oppressive tyranny in Burma. Children murdered in schools... And the ever-present racism, homophobia, and socioeconomic barriers. Sometimes, we even start to rank the things we care about, so that we can mete out sympathy. Caring for the environment need not replace the concern you have for people suffering. While our time and resources are limited, there is no reason we can’t care about every issue that inspires us. And once we care about the environment, we find there are small, even convenient ways to help protect God’s creation. We don’t have to do everything, just do something.”⁴

The shepherd is calling us, telling us to stop eating the roots, leading us to new, greener pastures, and showing us a better way in our relationship with the earth and with God. We may not be able to do everything, but we can do something. Walk Lightly on God’s earth.

⁴ Anderson