

*Abstract*Embracing a Hermeneutic of *Tikkun Olam*

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Over the past several decades the Episcopal Church, among other denominations and faith communities, have embraced the theology of creation care.

One of the major obstacles to creation care in the Church happens to be some of the teachings of the Church itself, namely teachings which incorporate a literal understanding of dominion as used in Genesis 1:26-28. When humanity sees itself as the pinnacle of God's creation, imbued with the right to rule the whole of creation in the name of God, there is an intrinsic danger that we might abuse that gift.

In his article "The Dominion Mandate and the Reconstructionist Movement," Bob DeWaay outlines a movement since the late twentieth century holding "the conviction that the Scripture gives the church a mandate to take dominion over this world socially and culturally before the bodily return of Jesus Christ."¹ This mandate, also called by some the "dominion covenant," extends beyond the social and cultural to embrace control over the physical world as well²

¹ Bob DeWaay, "The Dominion Mandate and the Christian Reconstruction Movement" Critical Issues Commentary Scholarly, <http://cicministry.org/scholarly/sch001.htm>. Accessed April 5, 2018.

² Ibid.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Defining the Problem of Dominionism	2
Chapter Two: Dominion: Reclaiming it, Renaming it, or Going Somewhere New?	43
Chapter Three: Embracing a Hermeneutic of <i>Tikkun Olam</i>	58
Chapter Four: Preaching <i>Tikkun Olam</i>	76
Chapter Five: Theological and Homiletical Analysis and Reflection on the Sermon Series	110
Closing Observations	122
Appendix A	127
Bibliography	130

Chapter One: Defining the Problem of Dominionism

The first two decades of this century are witness to what seems like an ever-increasing disquietude in American culture, religion, and politics. Ever since September 11, 2001, and the immediate fallout of that tragic day in our history it seems whatever ability to dialogue we may have discovered as a nation in the waning decades of the twentieth century has disintegrated. As I will explore in this document, Dominionism is one of the pervading ideologies helping bring about disconnections between human beings, between human beings and the natural world, and between human beings and their relationship with God. Chapter one will provide examples of cultural events and religious teachings related to Dominionism that have negatively impacted the fabric of society.

For many of us who lived through the anger and violence of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement and the protests concerning the Viet Nam war, the rhythm of civil strife today seems familiar. Partisan bickering took on a renewed fervor with our post 9/11 invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. According to The Southern Poverty Law Center, since immediately prior to 9/11 there has been an almost constant upswing in hate groups in America with a jump following the election of Barak Obama as President the United States in 2008. Although there was a brief decline in hate groups toward the end of the Obama administration there has been a significant upsurge during the Trump administration.³ And, according to Forbes Magazine, there was a 158% increase in gun

³ <https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map>, accessed November 3, 2018.

sales during the Obama administration.⁴ The 2003 election and consecration of Gene Robinson as Bishop in the Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire saw battle lines drawn in the Episcopal Church. Vice-President Al Gore’s documentary, “An Inconvenient Truth” (2006) caused an uproar in our nation over the topic of Climate Change.

In the midst of this dis-ease there are strains of what pundits refer to as Evangelical Christianity fanning the flames of discontent over issues identified with social justice. One example of this is the preaching of Rev. Brian Schwertley who serves at Covenanted Reformed Presbyterian Church in Prosper, TX. In a two part sermon in late May-early July 2012 Schwertley attacked issues surrounding members of the LGBTQ community, abortion, marriage equality, Muslims, the Koran, hedonism, and secular humanism as perversions of God’s design for human rule of creation.⁵

This conservative religious fervor tied to one political party and its political platforms goes back as early as the mid-to-late twentieth century to the Republican Party. From as early as Richard Nixon’s presidency, “Evangelicals had been on the lookout for a candidate whom they could embrace and Nixon courted them openly.”⁶ This alliance continued to grow in the mid-1970s with Supreme Court decision on Roe v. Wade as well as the continuing fight against desegregation.⁷ The late 1970s and 1980s saw the rise of

⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/frankminiter/2016/04/12/the-gun-industry-says-it-has-grown-158-since-obama-took-office/#3460fc677f4e>, accessed November 3, 2018.

⁵ <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=527121230569> Brian Schwertley Dominion Mandate Part 1, 5/27/2012 Covenanted Reformed Presbyterian Church in Prosper, TX, accessed November 6, 2018.

⁶ <https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/9394>, accessed November 6, 2018.

⁷ <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/05/religious-right-real-origins-107133?o=0>, accessed November 6, 2018.

the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family, and the Family Research Council.⁸ The alliance between the evangelical right and the Republican Party came to full fruition during the Presidential candidacy of Ronald Regan.⁹ It seems that preachers, rather than politicians, are the ones who have moved the Republican Party further to the right and set the stage for the Tea Party revolution. And while there are many diverse opinions and agendas within the Tea Party movement which began in 2009, there are also those who see the movement to embrace conservative ideals as religious in nature. A 2010 NPR story on the movement points out the religious aspects of the Tea Party Movement, understanding America to be “a divine experiment, [and] that the Founding Fathers were Christian men who created a nation [based] on biblical principles.”¹⁰

This political landscape in America has direct ties to a form of Dominion Mandate. A recent opinion piece in the *New York Times* (December 31, 2018) sheds light on current evangelical thought in Washington D.C. politics:

Ralph Drollinger, who has led weekly Bible study groups in the White House attended by Vice President Mike Pence and many other cabinet members, likes the word “king” so much that he frequently turns it into a verb. “Get ready to king in our future lives,” he tells his followers. “Christian believers will — soon, I hope — become the consummate, perfect governing authorities!”¹¹

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_right. Accessed November 6, 2018.

⁹ Daniel K. Williams, *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 1.

¹⁰ <https://www.npr.org/2010/09/30/130238835/the-tea-partys-tension-religions-role-in-politics>, accessed on December 1, 2018.

¹¹ Katherine Stewart, “Why Trump Reigns as King Cyrus” December 31, 2018 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/31/opinion/trump-evangelicals-cyrus-king.html>. Accessed on January 7, 2019.

Not only does Drollinger seem to buy into a form of Dominion Mandate, but he is enamored with a monarchical view of rule which flies in the face of our democratic republic. In addition, one may infer from his comments that this particular mandate has not only been given to Christians to rule over all but rather to a specific class of Christians with a specific theological point of view.

Dominionism (Also referred to as The Dominion Mandate) Defined

TV preachers like Pat Robertson ushered in a new period of Dominionism, or Dominion Theology, where true believers in Jesus Christ have been given dominion over all of creation – including those who do not believe in the Lordship of Jesus Christ as put forth by their movement:

God's plan is for His people, ladies and gentlemen, to take dominion. . . . What is dominion? Well, dominion is Lordship. He wants His people to reign and rule with Him. . . but He's waiting for us to. . . extend His dominion. . . . And the Lord says, 'I'm going to let you redeem society. There'll be a reformation. . . . We are not going to stand for those coercive utopians in the Supreme Court and in Washington ruling over us any more [sic]. We're not gonna [sic] stand for it. We are going to say, 'we want freedom in this country, and we want power. . . .' —Pat Robertson”¹²
According to the Christian Broadcasting Network Pat Robertson's The 700 Club reaches one million weekday viewers, which means his comments have an impact.¹³

What do we mean by Dominionism? Dominionism is predicated on what some Biblical Scholars refer to as the “mandate to dominate.” In his article “The Dominion Mandate and the Reconstructionist Movement,” Bob DeWaay outlines a movement since

¹² <http://libertymagazine.org/article/the-rise-of-dominionism-and-the-christian-right>. Pat Robertson quoted by John W. Whitehead, President of the Rutherford Institute, based in Charlottesville, VA, accessed May 17, 2018.

¹³ Christian Broadcasting Network, <https://rationalwiki.org>. Accessed on May 17, 2018.

the late twentieth century holding “the conviction that the Scripture gives the church a mandate to take dominion over this world socially and culturally before the bodily return of Jesus Christ.”¹⁴ According to DeWaay, this mandate is informed by passages such as Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 9:1-5; and Matthew 28:18-20. This mandate, also called by some the “dominion covenant,” extends beyond the social and cultural to embrace control over the physical world as well, and has been given to church as “Christ’s instrument of rule.”¹⁵ Further explaining the dominion covenant DeWaay quotes Christian Reconstructionist Gary North:

This is why **Genesis 1:26-28** is truly a covenant: it establishes the basis of the relationship between God and man . . . Man is actually defined by God in terms of this dominion covenant, or what is sometimes called the cultural mandate. This covenant governs all four God-mandated human governments: individual, family, church and civil. The range of dominion then includes dominion over other humans and human institutions.¹⁶

Dominionism, as defined by the dominion mandate, also includes dominion over the nonhuman aspects of the created order as well, understanding the purpose of creation to serve humanity who, in turn, serves the Creator. It can be noted that both North’s language for God and humankind, as well as his chosen translation of the Bible, are patriarchal. Those challenging a Reconstructionist view of Genesis 1:26-28 are quick to point out that both the man and the woman are granted dominion in the story, which indicates a perceived issue with patriarchy.

¹⁴ Bob DeWaay, “The Dominion Mandate and the Christian Reconstruction Movement” Critical Issues Commentary Scholarly, <http://cicministry.org/scholarly/sch001.htm>. Accessed April 5, 2018.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Other problematic issues with the dominion mandate as put forth by Reconstructionists include not only their embrace of humans ruling over other humans, but also the view that dominion was lost by Adam, restored in Christ, and that the Great Commission in Matthew 28 is a “restatement of the Genesis ‘dominion mandate.’”¹⁷

Norman C. Habel, who focuses much of his work on “the ecojustice principle of mutual custodianship,” finds the so-called dominion mandate problematic.¹⁸ That which has traditionally been translated as “to have dominion” can also be translated as “to serve.” When we choose to use the more violent or domineering ways of understanding the verses in Genesis 1 we immediately open the door to all kinds of abusive behavior. We are tempted to see ourselves as the rulers of creation, standing in place of God. We begin to believe that the earth is ours although it is plain to see in Genesis 1:26-28 that the earth, or the land, is one thing that God does not mention.

It is my position that misunderstandings and misuse of the words for dominion (*rada*) and subdue (*kavash*) found in Genesis 1:28 have led to the abusive theology of Dominionism. Theologies embracing movements such as white supremacy, anti-Semitism, patriarchy, anti-LGBT acceptance, and environmental apathy are all expressions of Genesis 1:28 both misunderstood and abused.

Dominion Mandate and the Right to Dominate the World

Conservative politicians, pundits, and preachers have embraced this notion of Dominionism which is predicated on a misreading of Genesis 1:26-28 and any

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Norman C. Habel, “Is the Wild Ox Willing to Serve You? Challenging the Mandate to Dominate.” *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst, Eds. (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001) 179.

subsequent Biblical texts dealing with dominion or subjugation. In the pages that follow it will become apparent that those who embrace the dominion mandate have a flawed understanding of dominion as presented in Genesis 1:26-28. This makes them unable to speak with any scriptural authenticity to the significant environmental and relational issues facing our people and our planet today.

In October 2016, at the request of the Baptist chaplains for the Oil Industry, Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin declared October 13 as Oilfield Prayer Day.¹⁹ The concern offered had nothing to do with the well-being of the environment, but rather the well-being of the Oil Industry including prayers for the protection of the industry itself.

“The oilfield is experiencing an economic disaster with catastrophic impact on the industry,” Tom Beddow, coordinator of the statewide affiliate of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Oil Patch Chaplains ministry, recently told the *Baptist Messenger*. “The most recognizable need is for the recovery of economic loss, but the greatest need in these depressive times is hope — the hope that comes from God.... The faith community is experiencing the same economic disaster, and it seems to have the same need, the recovery from financial loss,”²⁰ Beddow said. He described Praying for the Patch “as a biblically based plan to meet the spiritual needs of both the oilfield and faith communities by bringing believers and non-believers alike together for the purpose of ‘prayer and supplication with thanksgiving,’ so needs and requests can be made known to God.”²¹

¹⁹ <https://baptistnews.com/article/oklahoma-governor-urges-prayer-for-oil-industry/#.Wx8oRiAnblU>, Accessed March 22, 2017.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Theological statements like these have an impact on our political landscape and help shape current policy. Writing for Splinter, Brendan O’Conner reports,

At a town hall in Michigan last May, Republican Rep. Tim Walberg assured his constituents that, while the climate may be changing, they don’t need to be concerned. ‘As a Christian, I believe that there is a creator in God who is much bigger than us,’ he told them. ‘And I’m confident that, if there’s a real problem, He can take care of it.’

This idea—that whatever happens in God’s creation happens with His blessing—has deep roots in the American evangelical community....²²

Rob Nixon offers an alternative view regarding the blessing of fossil fuels. In his work, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Nixon highlights the harsher side of the oil industry by telling the story of Wadi al-Uyoun in Saudi Arabia. “The people of the wadi first experience oil’s blessings as violation; the Americans, having probed the soil at Wadi al-Uyoun, vanish then reappear in ‘yellow iron hulks.’ The ‘unearthly’ machines are neither of, nor for, this earth.”²³ Quoting from a work from William Roger Lewis and Ronald Robinson, Nixon continues:

They descended like ravenous wolves, tearing up the trees and throwing them to the earth one after another, and leveled all the orchards between the brook and the fields.... The trees shook violently and groaned before falling, cried for help, wailed, panicked, called out in helpless pain and then fell entreatingly to the ground, as if trying to snuggle into the earth to grow and spring forth again.²⁴

²² O’Connor, Brendan, How Fossil Fuel Money Made Climate Change Denial the Word of God. Splinter, 8/08/17 <https://splinternews.com/how-fossil-fuel-money-made-climate-denial-the-word-of-g-1797466298>.

²³ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2011) 82.

²⁴ Ibid 83.

Nixon grieves the loss of trees that had anchored the blended nomadic/semi-agrarian community of Wadi al-Uyoun. His story brings to mind the deep appreciation and importance of trees in the life of the Middle East. Author S. R. Hewitt writes,

There is another fascinating Midrash that shows the understanding of the sages for the significant role that trees play in stabilizing our environment: ‘Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai once said: “If you have a sapling in your hand, ready to plant, and the Messiah comes, plant the tree first and then go to greet him. What does this tell us about the importance of trees?”’ (*Avot d’ Rabbi Natan* B31)”²⁵

Rob Nixon writes that the people of the wadi experience oil’s blessings in yet another way:

In the second phase of oil’s benediction, the wadi’s now homeless people get displaced to a coastal refinery town, Harran, where they find themselves housed in furnace-like metal shacks and remade as laborers in a wage economy under foreign mastery. The worker compound is segregated from the transplanted American suburban enclave – in a Persian Gulf rendition of Jim Crow.

Thus the undifferentiated oil blessing becomes institutionalized as class distinction and racial segregation: nature’s unbounded bounty becomes incrementally bounded, privatized, partitioned. On the poor side of the wire, that bounty is reduced to the noises of luxury rising from the far side of the barricade and to the inner noise of yearning.²⁶

Rob Nixon shows us the all-to-human face of the problems our obsession with fossil fuels can create. Aside from the obvious dangers of air pollution and the proliferation of greenhouse gases, human communities and fragile economies are often placed at risk. When prospecting and drilling damage the ecosystem ways of life are changed. Lost or polluted water sources have a negative impact on animal and plant life.

²⁵ S. R. Hewitt, “Earth Day, Arbor Day and Judaism’s Environmental Ethic.” April 22, 2013 https://www.huffingtonpost.com/sr-hewitt/earth-day-arbor-day-and-judaisms-environmental-ethic_b_3131807.html. Accessed on January 5, 2019.

²⁶ Nixon 83-84.

While there may be some higher paying jobs created by the industry, many times these are held by skilled workers brought into the area by corporations. The local population who gravitate to work cites suffer not only from lower wages and crowded housing, but they have been forced to leave behind a way of life that has had deep meaning as well as deep roots.

The Dominion Mandate and Creation Theology and Dominion

Andrew S. Kulikovsky, author of *Creation, Fall, Restoration: A Biblical Theology of Creation*, is an active supporter of Creation Ministries International and runs the Biblical Hermeneutics website for the Centre for Worldview Studies in Adelaide, Australia.²⁷ He is the author of a three-part online series titled, “Creation, preservation and dominion.” Aside from his literal understanding of the creation stories from scripture, Kulikovsky also interprets the stories as giving humanity absolute rule of creation on the basis of Genesis 1:26-28. In the first installment of his series Kulikovsky writes in part:

“Despite its fallen state, God has not abandoned His creation. He constantly sustains and preserves it through His common grace and providence. Although fallen, human beings are still God’s image bearers and mankind is still the pinnacle of God’s creation. Furthermore, mankind still has dominion over the rest of creation and, as God’s stewards, we are still entrusted with the task of caring for, and tending to, the created order. Likewise, our God-given task to ‘[B]e fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it ...’ is still in effect. Contrary to the assertions of many in the modern environmental movement, the earth is not overpopulated and human beings are not parasites destroying the planet....

Humanity’s special relationship with the Creator and position over the rest of creation was set in place at the very beginning:

‘Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground ... I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole

²⁷ <https://creation.com/andrew-s-kulikovsky>. Accessed on October 27, 2018.

earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.””

It is clear, then, that not all life is equal. Human life stands above all other life. Human life is more precious to God because it reflects his own image....

In Genesis 1:28, God commands Adam and Eve to ‘Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the Earth and *subdue* it, [and] *rule* over [every creature].’ This implies an active role for mankind to take charge of the resources God has provided us in the natural world, and to use them for their benefit. The Hebrew verb שָׁבַב (*kěbăšš*, ‘to subdue, to subjugate’) stresses the act of dominance by force. In Numbers 32:20–22, 32:29, Joshua 18:1 and 1 Chronicles 22:17–19, *kěbăšš* is used in reference to subduing the Promised Land, including the hostile tribes that were occupying it at that time. In 2 Chronicles 28:9–10, Nehemiah 5:5 and Jeremiah 34:11, 16, it refers to subjugation in the form of slavery. In Esther 7:8, it refers to subduing or forcing a woman, and in Zechariah 9:15, it speaks of subduing enemies in warfare. There is also an overlap in the meaning of *kěbăšš* and of הָדָר (*rādāh*, ‘to rule, to have dominion’).... In Isaiah 41:2, God subdues kings before the ruler from the east, and in Ezekiel 34:4, it refers to the shepherds of Israel ruling over the people with cruelty. Thus, Calvin Beisner rightly concludes that the nature of the command to subdue and to rule in Genesis 1:28 involves ‘subduing and ruling something whose spontaneous tendency is to resist dominion....’

As noted above, mankind stands above the rest of creation, and it all ultimately exists for the benefit of humanity. Indeed, the Garden of Eden was clearly for the benefit of Adam and Eve and they had total dominion over it, apart from one tree—the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The fruit of all the other trees in the garden, as well as the seeded fruit from every other tree on the earth were, theirs for food. Note also that God’s command to ‘fill the earth and subdue it’ stands against the common view that the present rate of population growth is unsustainable and that overpopulation is a serious environmental problem and will ultimately destroy the earth (see below)....”

Once again quoting Beisner, Kulikovsky concludes,

...environmentalists believe that human population growth will strip the earth of its natural resources and smother it with pollution. A truly biblical worldview holds that continued population growth will result in the increased abundance of resources, rather than in their depletion, and

in a cleaner, more developed environment better suited to human habitation, rather than a polluted and poisoned Earth.²⁸

One problem with theologians such as Andrew Kulikovsky is their inability to look at the created order as one vast, interconnected world. They see humankind as the pinnacle of creation and therefore the purpose of the rest of creation is to meet our needs. Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, extolls the interdependence of all: “Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself... Disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbor... ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God, and with the earth.”²⁹

Kulikovsky also seems to misunderstand nature itself, as well as the Biblical role of humanity toward nature. He sees nature as unruly and at odds with humanity. And yet as we will show in chapter two humanity’s role in the garden is not to subdue or subjugate the earth, but to till it, to care for it, and to assist it in producing fruit. The animals brought before the first human being in Genesis 2 are not brought forward as beasts to be tamed, but rather as potential helpers and as fellow creatures created by God. The idea of dominion in Genesis 2 is found in the human being naming the creatures brought forward, but together they are meant to share the work of caring for the world.

And while the idea of uncontrolled population growth as a factory for generating more resources might sound reassuring to some, it is inconceivable that an increase in

²⁸ Andrew S. Kulikovsky, “Creation, preservation and dominion, Part 1: God, humanity and the created order” April 2009 <https://creation.com/creation-preservation-and-dominion-part-1>. Accessed on October 27, 2018.

²⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*: On Care For Our Common Home (Vatican City, Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2015) 117.

population can somehow magically (or even scientifically) produce an increase in resources that are most assuredly limited.

Kulikovsky, Creation, Preservation, and Dominion, Part 1:

In part one of his work, Kulikovsky also explains that most of the “billowing white ‘smoke’” coming from smoke stacks is “only steam and not polluting the atmosphere with CO₂ or particulate,” ignores the down-side to mega dams that flood properties and limit downstream water flow, and extols the virtues of genetically modified seeds and crops while ignoring harsh copyrights owned by seed companies and the greater expenses upon farmers forced to use the products.³⁰

Along those same lines, The Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation has been actively seeking to curtail any political attempts to regulate industry in terms of the environment. In their document titled “Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming” the alliance affirms:

We believe Earth and its ecosystems—created by God’s intelligent design and infinite power and sustained by His faithful providence—are robust, resilient, self-regulating, and self-correcting, admirably suited for human flourishing, and displaying His glory. Earth’s climate system is no exception. Recent global warming is one of many natural cycles of warming and cooling in geologic history.

We deny that Earth and its ecosystems are the fragile and unstable products of chance, and particularly that Earth’s climate system is vulnerable to dangerous alteration because of minuscule changes in atmospheric chemistry. Recent warming was neither abnormally large nor abnormally rapid. There is no convincing scientific evidence that human contribution to greenhouse gases is causing dangerous global warming.³¹

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ The Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation, “Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming,” <https://cornwallalliance.org/landmark-documents/evangelical-declaration-on-global-warming-2/>. Accessed on January 8, 2019.

Exploring the same line of thinking, a fairly recent study from Rutgers University posits that climate change denial among those who belong to faith communities may be due, in part, to the deniers' belief that humanity, created in the image and likeness of God is all that is to be valued. The study states in part:

Imago Dei, the predominant intrinsic value system of religious monotheists, excludes non-humans, leading to neglect of the environment, even if it is closely tied to human beings. We have examined further this relationship between religion, the Imago Dei intrinsic value system, and anthropogenic climate change. Converting anthropogenic climate change deniers may be a matter of including the environment as being inseparable from human life, so that those that hold Imago Dei close, can now start taking care of the world they live in.³²

The Cornwall Alliance, along with similar leaning religious groups highlight one of the more frustrating aspects of Dominionism. Many of these groups place their pro-development stance within a theological construct, often with a literalistic reading. Yet they somehow manage to ignore one of the most basic points of the creation stories – that the creation is good, and that God does not give humanity the land. The land belongs to God and should be treated with care and respect. But even if they were to somehow justify the destruction of the environment, believing unchecked development furthers humanity's development, their vision is short-sighted. We cannot separate humanity from the environment.

One need only look at the ongoing water issues in Flint, Michigan to see how our abuse of the environment and lack of care for a low socio-economic community created a crisis for human beings. After a cost-saving move to use Flint River water for the city

³² Brian Ezawa and Julie M. Fagan, "Religious beliefs a root cause of the denial of climate change being anthropogenic," Rutgers University, 2015 <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/51571/>. Accessed January 8, 2019.

problems erupted. The city, and then the state, failed to use anti-corrosion treatments for the water which caused iron and lead to leach into the water supply at levels significantly above safe limits for lead ingestion. The city, and then the state, failed to properly treat the water for harmful bacteria.³³ Flint is an example of Dominionism on at least three levels. First, the switch was made to use the Flint River as a cost-cutting exercise without regard to any impact on city residents. Second, human negligence and ongoing development had left the new water source (the Flint River) polluted, and proper treatment of the water was not undertaken. Finally, it is quite possible that the lower socio-economic status of the residents of Flint made any action on the part of the state of Michigan a lower priority than it should have been.

Kulikovsky, Creation, Preservation, and Dominion, Part 2:

In part two of his series, “Christianity, development and environmentalism,” Kulikovsky again places humanity’s dominion mandate above all else. He opens his second essay writing, “Natural resources are part of God’s provision. Open-cut mining is a safe and efficient method of extracting natural resources so that they may be used for the benefit of human society.”³⁴

Writing about development and environmentalism Kulikovsky decries what he sees as a modern day “romanticized, virtually pantheistic view of nature” which he says “many Christians...appear to have accepted...pointing to a number of degradations in

³³ “Flint Water Crisis Fast Facts” Updated December 6, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2016/03/04/us/flint-water-crisis-fast-facts/index.html>. Accessed on March 4, 2019.

³⁴ Andrew S. Kulikovsky, “Creation, preservation and dominion, Part 2, Christianity, development and environmentalism,” August 2009 <https://creation.com/creation-preservation-and-dominion-part-2>. Accessed on October 27, 2018.

creation they claim are a result of resource consumption and sustained population growth.”³⁵ He writes,

These degradations of creation can be summed up as 1) land degradation; 2) deforestation; 3) species extinction; 4) water degradation; 5) global toxification; 6) the alteration of atmosphere; 7) human and cultural degradation. Many of these degradations are signs that we are pressing against the finite limits God has set for creation. With continued population growth, these degradations will become more severe. Our responsibility is not only to bear and nurture children, but to nurture their home on earth.¹

For many Christian environmentalists, industrial and agricultural development, and the utilization of resources in the natural world are viewed as morally equivalent to destroying the Garden of Eden, and a crime not only against God but humanity in general. Such views have no theological support, and proponents seem to have forgotten that the Fall has taken place. In fact, such ideas are essentially pagan.

In truth, we have an abundance of natural resources, which is what one would expect from a generous God who provides.³⁶

If what Kulikovsky believes about God’s providing for us even as we squander the creation is true, one has to wonder about the purpose of God’s placing humanity in the Garden to till it and to care for it, or why God’s design for the creation implied a synergism among humanity, the land, and all the other creatures.³⁷

Kulikovsky also addresses pollution in his second installment. As we have stated above, Kulikovsky believes that the many plumes of white smoke issuing from smokestacks across the land is nothing more than harmless water vapor. He also endorses open-cut mining, calling it a “safe and efficient method of extracting natural resources so

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Kulikovsky.

³⁷ Genesis 2:4-24. The Jewish Study Bible, Second Edition. All Old Testament Quotes are from this source unless otherwise noted.

that they may be used for the benefit of human society.” He pivots away from the harsh realities of pollution by challenging environmentalists’ definition of pollution, saying, they see “any kind of industrial or agricultural development...as just another form of pollution.”³⁸ Kulikovsky, championing development over creation care, continues:

Industrialization is also said to be responsible for acid rain, the destruction of the ozone layer, the onset of a new ice age, and the contrary onset of global warming. Environmentalists also claim that pesticides, herbicides and heavy metals are poisoning the food chain, and that chemical preservatives and radiation from atomic power plants, electric power lines, television sets, microwave ovens, and other electrical appliances, cause cancer and other detrimental health problems. This has naturally led the environmental movement toward pathological anti-industrialization and anti-development.³⁹

Kulikovsky goes on in his treatise to explain that drinking water is now cleaner than it has ever been, air quality is better than ever before, and concludes his comments on pollution with a rather fantastical claim:

In addition, the average citizen in a modern western society generates far less garbage today than at any time in the past. As a result of modern packaging methods, there is much less need to dispose of large quantities of animal and vegetable matter, such as chicken feathers, fish scales, and corn husks. Even the kinds of garbage unique to modern developed societies, such as disposable diapers/nappies, fast-food containers and all plastics, make a relatively small and insignificant contribution to overall garbage generation.⁴⁰

Even if his claim about the average citizen in modern western society is true, he completely ignores the rest of the modern day world and discounts the massive increase

³⁸ Andrew S. Kulikovsky, “Creation, preservation and dominion, Part 2, Christianity, development and environmentalism,” August 2009 <https://creation.com/creation-preservation-and-dominion-part-2>. Accessed on October 27, 2018.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

of population over and against civilizations where chicken feathers, fish scales, and corn husks were the primary forms of garbage. One can hardly call concern for the environment “pathological anti-industrialization and anti-development.” Rather, such rhetoric ignores the positive strides taken by humanity to help heal the environment after more than a century of abuse, and becomes a clarion call for the deregulation of policies that have been helpful in the past.

And while we have been successful at cleaning up both air and water pollution in the United States, we haven’t been perfect. Flint, Michigan, discussed above, is one example. Also, since the dawn of the Industrial Age carbon dioxide emissions, most of which are caused by humans, have continued to increase exponentially. Carbon dioxide, methane, and other gases in the air act “like the glass in a greenhouse, reflecting back to earth...increasing amounts of heat radiating toward space.”⁴¹ Whether we want to acknowledge it or not, this increase of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere continues to affect our climate and our safety as we see increases in major catastrophic weather events causing unimaginable financial hardship as well as damage to our ability to grow and harvest crops.

While not specifically addressing Kulikovsky’s comments, Norman Wirzba writes about dominion and environmental care:

As every good gardener knows, one cannot simply impose one’s desire on the earth. Good gardening begins with careful, sustained observation of the ground, the weather, and the interaction of plants and pests. A gardener must adopt nature and its creative processes as his or her tutor if anything like gardening success is to occur....

⁴¹ Stephan A. Jurovics, *Hospitable Planet: Faith, Action, and Climate Change* (New York, Morehouse Publishing, 2016) 80.

Contemporary agricultural and gardening techniques are heavy on dominion and control. We see the unwillingness to learn from the particularities of place when we design gardens and fields in such a way that the plants on them cannot survive without heavy doses of pesticide and fertilizer.⁴²

Wirzba and others like him, Wendell Berry, for example, understand how the use of petro-chemicals in pesticides and fertilizers have abused the land. Dominionism, as it is practiced in farming actually harms food security, food democracy, and food sovereignty, all of which are related. All three are challenged as we continue to move from locally owned farms to large, industrial farms. People lose touch with the land. Michael Northcott reminds us that “just six seed companies now control the majority of seeds sold commercially worldwide.”⁴³ The abuse of historic aquifers for irrigation, the use of fossil-fuel fertilizers, and increased use of insecticides and herbicides give short-term increased production, but at the cost of damaging the soil, eventually leading to lower yields. World-wide, small farmers are forced to grow cash crops at the expense of crops which feed their families and the communities around them. Food sovereignty “resists...single crop production values...and the transfer of land ownership and power over food production and diet from small farmers and householders to agricultural and industrial food corporations.”⁴⁴

Finally, Kulikovsky addresses the issue of extinction in his second installment, pointing out several extinct species and stating that their disappearance “has had no measurable impact on the earth or any human community.” He writes:

⁴² Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2003) 115.

⁴³ Michael Northcott, *Place, Ecology and the Sacred: The Moral Geography of Sustainable Communities* (New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2015) 128.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 131.

Although the reckless destruction of species should be avoided and the impact on animal habitats minimised, there will often be a fundamental and unavoidable conflict between the needs of humans and the needs of a particular variety of plant or animal. Therefore, one may ask: Is it critical for every species to survive? Putting it in context, is it acceptable to set aside vast tracts of land for agriculture and/or housing in order to provide food and shelter for hundreds of thousands of people, in exchange for the loss of a particular species of parrot or lizard? Clearly, the answer depends on the relative value one places on human beings compared to other creatures. It is a question of whose needs should ultimately prevail. Human beings are faced with the choice of fulfilling their own needs or sacrificing themselves (or their fellow human beings) for the sake of some variety of plant or animal. For many environmentalists and conservationists, it is human beings who should submit.⁴⁵

A rather frustrating aspect of Kulikovsky's stance on extinction is how it seems to fly in the face of his literal interpretations of scripture. Here he takes a rather cavalier attitude toward the survival of many species, and yet ignores the command of God to Noah that every creature should be saved. One only need look at God's command to Noah prior to the flood. Although Noah, as a human being created in the image and likeness of God, has dominion over all creatures, the passage in Genesis 6 shows he has no discretion on the matter of who and what should be saved.⁴⁶

Kulikovsky is not alone in his dismissal of species extinction. Writing in *The Washington Post*, R. Alexander Pyron, Associate Professor of Biology at the George Washington University asserts, "We don't need to save endangered species. Extinction is part of evolution," Pyron writes further, "Even if we live as sustainably as we can, many creatures will die off, and alien species will disrupt formerly 'pristine' native ecosystems.... It this means fewer dazzling species, fewer unspoiled forests, less untamed

⁴⁵ Kulikovsky.

⁴⁶ Genesis 6:19-22; 7:1-2.

wilderness, so be it.”⁴⁷ Pyron dismisses Pope Francis’ stance on the moral imperative to support biodiversity saying, that while we should “refrain from polluting waterways, limit consumption of fossil fuels and rely more on low-impact renewable-energy sources...Conservation is needed for ourselves and only ourselves.”⁴⁸ Pyron’s comments underscore the human-first theology of Dominionism. In essence, Pyron declares humanity as the elevated agents of creation and dismisses, or at least discounts, agency for any other part of creation.

In addition, there are Christian camps that believe any attempts at conservation and reversal of issues like climate change are a waste of time and an affront to God. In a Christian podcast called “WWUTT” (When We Understand the Text), one podcaster (unidentified on the podcast or their website) says,

“Hey! Have you heard? The polar ice caps are melting! We’re all going to drown!!

Oh... God already said He wasn’t going to do that again.

But, the “*Consumer Driven Church*” still gets sucked into phony environmentalism, which has been branded “Creation Care.”

But you cannot reverse the effects of creation’s decline.

Consider the work of God: who can straighten what God has made crooked? (Ecclesiastes 7:13)

God told us to have dominion over all creation, to fill the earth and subdue it.

And God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the

⁴⁷ R. Alexander Pyron. “We don’t need to save endangered species. Extinction is part of evolution.” November 22, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/we-dont-need-to-save-endangered-species-extinction-is-part-of-evolution/2017/11/21/57fc5658-cdb4-11e7-a1a3-0d1e45a6de3d_story.html?utm_term=.e14bac8e657e. Accessed January 5, 2017.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth. (Genesis 1:28)

Now, that includes treasuring our resources and respecting all living creatures. There are verses about that.

Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel. Whoever will work his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense. (Proverbs 12:10-11)

But the only “global warming” the world needs to be concerned about is the fire of God being stored up for the Day of Judgment and the destruction of the ungodly.⁴⁹

In their book, *Fear, Wonder, and Science in the New Age of Reproductive Biotechnology*, Scott Gilbert and Clara Pinto-Correia write, “Science and religion need to form alliances to preserve the wonder of this world; they need to form alliances to preserve the creatures of this world; and they need to form alliances to keep alive the curiosity and the awe that allow their own renewal.”⁵⁰ The authors go on to note a different take on Ecclesiastes 7:13 from the Christian podcast above. They write, “One medieval Rabbinic commentary (Midrash Rabbah, a commentary on Ecclesiastes 7:13) has God showing Adam the glories of Creation, saying, ‘Take care not to spoil or destroy my world. If you ruin it, there’s no one to repair it after you.’” They go on to warn us, “We are multiplying so fast that we are overspilling the livable acreage of the planet.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Author unidentified. “When We Understand The Text” <http://christianpodcastcentral.com/wwutt-christians-environment-creation-care/>. Accessed January 5, 2019.

⁵⁰ Scott Gilbert and Clara Pinto-Correia, *Fear, Wonder, and Science in the New Age of Reproductive Biotechnology*. (New York, Columbia University Press, 2017) 200.

⁵¹ Ibid 200.

Writing about the care and love God holds for creation S. R. Hewitt, author of the blogsite “Jewish Treats,” shares the same Midrash in an article on Earth Day/Arbor Day.⁵² In her article, Hewitt goes on to speak about the importance of planting and protecting trees as a way of providing for the creatures of God. Her article, based in part on passages from Leviticus 19-25 and Psalm 104, may well find its roots in Leviticus 25:23 where the Lord emphatically states, “the land is Mine,” and is only given to Israel as long as they care for it and give it “a sabbath of complete rest,” and care for the neighbor as well .”⁵³

In her Earth Day/Arbor Day article Hewitt points out a process for the care of the land through the planting of trees. She writes, “The Bible sets forth as a foremost priority to care for the land by properly seeding and planting it. ‘When you will come into the land, and you will plant any tree for food...’ (Leviticus 19:23). Planting trees is regarded as the first step to building an ecologically sound environment.”⁵⁴ Hewitt also points out God’s command that even in times of war fruit trees should not be destroyed, nor should there be any “wanton, unnecessary, destruction such as breaking vessels and blocking water sources.”⁵⁵ Finally, Hewitt writes,

Biblical law also recognized the importance of preserving the natural habitat of each and every species: ‘You make springs gush forth in torrents, they make their way between the hills, giving drink to all the wild beasts; the wild asses slake their thirst. The birds of the sky dwell beside them and sing among the foliage. ... The trees of the L-rd drink their fill,

⁵² S. R. Hewitt, “Earth Day, Arbor Day and Judaism’s Environmental Ethic.” April 22, 2013 https://www.huffingtonpost.com/sr-hewitt/earth-day-arbor-day-and-judaisms-environmental-ethic_b_3131807.html. Accessed on January 5, 2019.

⁵³ Lev. 25:2-7, 13-17.

⁵⁴ Hewitt.

⁵⁵ *ibid.* Quoting Deut. 20:19 and referring to the work of Maimonides.

the cedars of Lebanon, [G-d's] own planting, where birds make their nest; the stork has her home in the junipers. The high mountains are for wild goats; the crags are a refuge for the rock badgers' (Psalms 104:10-18).⁵⁶ Hewitt's article gives us a keen insight into what it means for the whole of creation to have agency. Each part of creation has a purpose, and that purpose is to honor and celebrate the God of its creation, not to serve humanity. Such a statement does not discount the innumerable benefits humanity experiences when the creation is healthy and whole. For instance planting trees, as Hewitt speaks about, produce many benefits for humanity. Aside from cleaning the air and producing oxygen, they have a cooling effect on the climate, and have been shown to actually reduce stress in humans.⁵⁷ Even if we are unwilling to recognize creation's agency, we might at least be willing to acknowledge the benefits of a healthy environment for human well-being.

The Dominion Mandate and White Supremacy

Skewed understandings of dominion in Genesis 1:26-28 are also foundational to religious incarnations of white supremacy. Dominionism opens the door for various forms of discrimination or abuse where prejudice exists. If one understands a particular portion or portions of the human race to actually be sub-human (e.g. people of color or members of the Jewish faith) it becomes an easy task to tie one's prejudice to a perceived dominion mandate. White Supremacy exists outside of theological constructs as well as within. Dominionism becomes a peg upon which to hang one's prejudicial cloak and hood when certain groups of humanity are perceived to less than fully human. Pastor Mark Downey in his 2011 sermon, Taking Dominion, part 1, proclaims:

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ See my sermon for the Sixth Sunday After the Epiphany in Chapter Four.

Legitimate Christian dominion is not anarchy. The Law of God to be exercised and executed has a natural pecking order; authorities of the supreme authority, as David assembled all the princes of Israel in I Chron. 28:1: ‘The princes of the tribes, and the captains of the companies that minister to the king by course, and the captains over the 1000's and captains over 100's, and the stewards over all the substance and possession of the king and of his sons with the officers and with the mighty men and with all the valiant men.’ So you can see we have various heads responsible for particular categories, all for the same reason: accountability. Whenever this mechanism is tampered with, we will always witness the line between freedom and slavery obfuscated with the fraudulent dominion of darkness. If our people don't want to be White Supremacists according to Deut. 7:6, being a holy people, whom the Lord hath chosen to be special . . . above all people (races) that are upon the face of the earth, then the jews [sic] and niggers [sic] shall be the head and thou shalt be the tail. And we can wag our tails while they wag the whole dog.⁵⁸

White Supremacists, like members of all hate groups, always seek justification for their prejudice. Downey’s use of the Hebrew Scriptures to prove his point against Jews and people of color is flawed at best. It is disingenuous and poor biblical scholarship. To begin with, Downey ignores the theological premise that all of humanity is created in the image and likeness of God. Second, the passage from First Chronicles has nothing at all to do with racial or religious supremacy over others. Finally, the passage from Deuteronomy is directed toward faithful members of the covenant between God and Israel. In fact, the passage refers to the Jewish people who have been “consecrated to the Lord” to be God’s “treasured people.”⁵⁹ And who are God’s chosen people separated from in this passage? They are to be separate from the Canaanites, and at the same time

⁵⁸ <http://kinsmanredeemer.com/taking-dominion-part-1>, accessed April 5, 2018.

⁵⁹ Dt. 7:6

known as “the exclusive property of God.”⁶⁰ There is nothing inferior about that status before God and humanity.

The Dominion Mandate and Human Sexuality

Though not couched in terms of the Dominion Mandate, there are Christians who believe fellow human beings who are LGBTQ have no place in society. It is amazing how pastors get away with preaching violence against people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered. This violence was front and center following the June 12, 2016, deadly shooting at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida where 49 people were killed and an additional 53 others were wounded. Pulse was known as a gay nightclub.

Following the deadly shooting Pastor Roger Jimenez of Sacramento proclaimed, “The tragedy is that more of them didn’t die.... The tragedy is — I’m kind of upset that he didn’t finish the job! Because these people are predators! They are abusers!”⁶¹

According to New York Times reporter Mike McPhate, “Rebecca Barrett-Fox, a visiting assistant professor of sociology at Arkansas State University who has researched Christian extremists, said she had tracked about five churches — in California, Texas, Arizona, and Tennessee — where preachers had endorsed the killings in Orlando.”⁶²

Barrett-Fox continued:

One of the consequences of that is you can get whole congregations that spin further and further away from the norm of what is accepted theology,” she said.

⁶⁰ Ibid. See the accompanying commentary for the passage.

⁶¹ Mike McPhate, “Pastors Praise Anti-Gay Massacre in Orlando, Prompting Outrage.” June 27, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/28/us/pastors-praise-anti-gay-massacre-in-orlando-prompting-outrage.html>. Accessed January 3, 2017.

⁶² Ibid.

The independent Baptist churches where anti-gay hatred has flourished tend to have small congregations, more likely to number in the dozens than the hundreds, experts said.

Sermons posted online since the attack have been interspersed with dehumanizing labels for L.G.B.T. people reminiscent of those used by the perpetrators of historical genocides. The Orlando victims were “sodomites,” “reprobates,” “perverts” and “scum of the earth,” preachers have said.⁶³

Again, while preachers such as those above do not voice their proclamations in light of a Dominion Mandate, their de-humanization of members of the LGBT community, and their belief that they can exercise life or death over that community, can be seen as correlating to the theology of Dominionism. If a person of faith believes any group of people to be somehow sub-human, such as persons who are either LGBT, a person of color, or Jewish (as noted above), then it stands to reason that those who are faithful would have dominion. Having dominion over someone or something, or having a right belief over one who’s beliefs are questionable, certainly can be seen as giving license to act violently toward that person or group.

Heidi Beirich, director of intelligence for The Southern Poverty Law Center states, “I think it is entirely possible that someone could be inspired by [the shooting at the Pulse Nightclub] and kill gay people. This kind of message is exactly akin to Hitlerian ideas of exterminating Jews. It’s that extreme. It’s basically genocidal toward a population.”⁶⁴

The comments following the massacre at the Pulse Nightclub are not dissimilar from statements preached in North Carolina during the heated debate over a bathroom

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

bill which barred transgendered persons from using the restroom for their self-identified gender. Long since removed from YouTube a Maiden, NC pastor's sermon went viral for a while. In his sermon Pastor Charles Worley called gay persons to be herded behind an electrified fence and left to die, suggesting "a great big large fence 50 or 100 miles long. Put all the lesbians in there. Fly over and drop some food. Do the same thing with the queers and the homosexuals. Have that fence electrified so they can't get out. You know what, in a few years, they'll die out. You know why? They can't reproduce."⁶⁵

It is not the purpose of this paper to debate issues of human sexuality. However, the purpose of this section is to show how a skewed sense of dominion can be abused and can be deadly when directed at groups of people seen to be somehow lacking in their orthodoxy. It should be more than apparent when exploring the whole canon of scripture that enacting any form of violence against someone based on their sexuality in no way conforms to the basic tenets of Judaism or Christianity. And yet this is one of the more harmful outcomes when one is fueled by a false sense of authority and power understood to be granted through a mandate to dominate those who are seen as unfaithful.

Dominion Given to the Church Above All Else

Preaching with less vitriol than Downey, Rebecca Greenwood, founder and president of Christian Harvest International, is another proponent of Dominion Theology. She preaches:

Dominion rule has become a regular confession among many believers. The church's voice is resounding with the desire to see the manifestation of our God-given assignment to rule and reign over the earth (see Gen. 1:26-28).

⁶⁵ Wisconsin Gazette, "Protesters demonstrate against anti-gay N.C. pastor." https://www.wisconsin Gazette.com/news/protesters-demonstrate-against-anti-gay-n-c-pastor/article_09fb649e-d592-59cf-9e8e-36e02e986d04.html. Accessed on January 3, 2019.

However, if all we do is confess, this goal will not be realized. Authority does not come through confession. Authority is uncompromisingly tied to responsibility. And it is only one facet of walking in dominion.

You see, God has called us to be His kingdom representatives on earth, to establish a righteous paradigm. We need more than authority to do that. When we identify the areas over which He has given us influence and commit to being agents of change in them, everything we need to transform the culture and cause the lost to be drawn to Him is made available to us—favor, creativity, power, wisdom, and so on.⁶⁶

Greenwood's remarks seem reasonable, calling us to be responsible with the dominion given to humanity at the dawn of creation. However, she also falls into the trap of preaching that as a result of The Fall in Genesis 3, dominion has been taken away from most of humanity and restored only in the true followers of Jesus Christ. This is one of the primary tenets of the Dominion Mandate as stated earlier in this chapter. Greenwood proclaims:

To understand, let's look more closely at this original stewardship appointment. *Kabas*, the Hebrew word for "subdue," means "to bring into subjection, to dominate." It suggests that the party being subdued is not willing to submit. Genesis 1:28 implies that creation was unwilling to submit to man's leading. Man would have to bring creation into order by exerting his strength. *Radah*, the Hebrew word for "dominion," refers not to God's rule and responsibility but to man's. It means "to manage or reign from a position of sovereignty." God fashioned us to share His own authority over His creation.

Adam was to live and move in a kingly manner over the earth as a son of God along with the incredible privileges and weighty responsibilities of this position. Dominion was his birthright and pleasure.

But after Adam succumbed to Satan's deception in the Garden of Eden, the enemy established strongholds in all areas of life to hinder our kingdom mandate.

⁶⁶ Greenwood, Rebecca, "How to Walk in Authority" <https://www.charismamag.com/spirit/spiritual-warfare/2425-take-up-your-scepter>, accessed July 11, 2017.

Thankfully, God made a way for us to regain our kingdom authority. He did not forget His covenant plan. After Adam and Eve sinned, He sent Jesus, the second Adam, to save man from his lost condition and provide a better covenant (see Heb. 8:6).⁶⁷

Clearly, Greenwood's take on dominion is not echoed by either the Psalmist or the author of the Wisdom of Solomon who proclaim boldly that God's gift of dominion still exists among God's people long after the fall described in Genesis 3. In fact the Psalmist even describes humanity as "crowned...with honor and glory":

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.⁶⁸

O God of my ancestors and Lord of mercy,
who have made all things by your word,
and by your wisdom have formed humankind
to have dominion over the creatures you have made.⁶⁹

In a July 13, 2017 sermon titled, "Taking Our Place in God's Dominion Mandate," Nnaemeka Durueke echoed Greenwood's mistaken exegesis:

It is important to know those who really have this dominion over all just like Christ. Is it every man or those who are in Christ? Adam sinned *and lost the dominion over the earth to the devil* whose bidding he

⁶⁷ Greenwood, Rebecca, "How to Walk in Authority" <https://www.charismamag.com/spirit/spiritual-warfare/2425-take-up-your-scepter>, accessed July 11, 2017.

⁶⁸ Ps. 8:5-8.

⁶⁹ Wis. 9:1-2.

did – Genesis 3:1-7, Romans 6:16. God was going to deal with the devil through another man, Jesus – Hebrews 2:14-16, 1 John 3:8. With the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the devil was defeated totally. Now Jesus Christ is the verified head of all principalities and power, either friend or foe – Colossians 2:10-15....

As co-heirs with Christ and His representatives on earth, *we have the right to exercise power over the enemy* in Jesus name. Since we are ambassadors – His personal representatives of the heavenly kingdom to the earthly kingdom – we have His authority throughout the earth. God partners with us to stand against the works of evil and spread the gospel of Christ – 2 Cor 5:20, Matt 16:18-19: The work ‘Kingdom’ in this passage refers to the royal power and dominion involving the license of authority to rule. Jesus placed the keys of the kingdom in the hands of the church. We not only have access to them but also have the right to use them – Luke 10:19, 1 John 5:19.⁷⁰

Durueke’s preaching is based on an interpretation of Genesis 3 that does not hold together. The dominion mandate, however we wish to define the phrase, is not removed as a result of The Fall in Genesis 3. This becomes obvious in light of God’s post-flood covenant with Noah and his family Genesis 9:1-7.⁷¹ Durueke, like Rebecca Greenwood above, labors under the false assumption that the dominion proclaimed in Genesis 1 has been taken away from humanity upon the expulsion from the Garden and not restored until Christ completed his work on the cross. Greenwood’s assumptions, aside from being poor exegesis on her part, carry with them an inherent attitude of anti-Semitism. Christians reading or listening to Greenwood could understand her interpretation to mean that God has taken any form of dominion away from the Jews and given it to Christians. This sense of Christianity’s supersessionism of Judaism is not supported by the text.

⁷⁰ <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/taking-our-place-in-god-s-dominion-mandate-nnaemeka-durueke-sermon-on-dominion-210259> Accessed November 6, 2018, emphasis added.

⁷¹ In Gen. 9 God once again gives dominion to humanity with certain restrictions, such as refraining from partaking of the life-blood of an animal or the taking of human life.

This would be true only if we were to assume the image of God given humanity at creation was destroyed utterly in The Fall. This is not a given among theologians and biblical scholars. In a series of retreat addresses published posthumously under the title, *The Image and Likeness of God*, Dom Gregory Dix compares that image and likeness to a reflection in a mirror. Though the image reflected by the mirror may be tarnished, cracked, and scarred, it is never completely destroyed. Though distorted by sin, the image remains, and may, in fact be burnished to its original luster.⁷²

The Dominion Mandate and the Prosperity Gospel

Another example of Dominion Theology gone awry includes the proclamation of a Prosperity Gospel which teaches in part that anything and everything is understood as a tool toward humanity's ultimate prosperity. This may be one of the most insidious forms of Dominionism because it is cloaked in the promise of a successful life which resonates deeply with people living on the financial edge. Wealthy, secure, evangelists who are supposed to be trustworthy servants of God basically talk people out of money they cannot afford to lose. Prosperity Gospel preachers are basically saying, "This is my domain, it is not yours. You are here to serve me and to make me more prosperous."

In the late 1970s, I worked at a small radio station in Columbia, South Carolina. Our format was Christian music and programming. Almost all our non-musical programming consisted of tapes sent in from evangelists around the nation. More often than not their 30-60 minute programs concluded with tearful pleas for listeners to send money to help keep their programming going. Their pleas were always accompanied with promises that sending their money would result in their being blessed many times over by

⁷² Dom Gregory Dix, *The Image and Likeness of God*, (London: Dacre Press 1953) 71.

God. I even listened to one prominent radio and TV evangelist tell his listeners that they should write a check to his ministry even if they didn't currently have the funds in their account because God would bless their faith and send them even more money in return. Here was a veiled promise that those whose faith is strong enough will have dominion over the financial powers of this world.

Proponents of the Prosperity Gospel are well known: from Jim and Tammy Bakker in the late twentieth century, to Joel Osteen and Creflo Dollar who are still going strong, to televangelist Jesse Duplantis, who has let it be known that God wants his followers to help him buy a new Jet, stating that had Jesus come among us in this century "He'd be on an airplane preaching the gospel all over the world."⁷³ Indeed, as reported by Cleve Wootson, Jr. of the Washington Post, Jesus wouldn't have been willing to travel coach like every day folks. He would have wanted his own Falcon 7X!⁷⁴

Joel Osteen proclaims, "I believe that God's dream is that we be successful in our careers and that we be able to send our kids to college. I don't mean that everyone is going to be rich, and I preach a lot on blooming where you're planted. But I don't have the mindset that money is a bad thing."⁷⁵ And again, "I believe God, Jesus, died that we not just go to Heaven but that we excel in this life. I never think you make money your

⁷³ Cleve R. Wootson, Jr. (May 29, 2018) https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/05/29/a-televangelist-wants-his-followers-to-pay-for-a-54-million-private-jet-its-his-fourth-plane/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.abe0901aa8cfplane/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.abe0901aa8cffollowers-to-pay-for-a-54-million-private-jet-its-his-fourth-plane/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.5afb54f6242c. Accessed June 12, 2017.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Joel Osteen Quotes https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/joel_osteen Accessed on June 12, 2017.

goal... God wants you to excel. Just keep Him in first place, and God will open up doors you never dreamed of.”⁷⁶

Creflo Dollar puts it this way: “Everything bad that happens in our lives is the result of us turning on a spiritual law that governs it, whether we know it or not.... With God living in us, we have the ability to make our way prosperous and have good success.”⁷⁷ According to Christian Post reporter Leonardo Blair, Dollar “is now offering a \$19 per month online Bible study that he says will help people make withdrawals from God’s metaphorical bank account.”⁷⁸ “This grace life message is about providing you with the access which is understanding of God's word. Listen, understanding God's word enables you to receive all of the abundant provisions, resources, and promises that are available through Jesus's finished work on the cross,’ he said. ‘... Become a student of grace and join me and thousands of others in the Grace Life Academy.”⁷⁹ Dollar’s ministry, along with other proponents of the Prosperity Gospel, is all about bending the financial and physical resources of the natural world to what he believes to be the will of God for faithful believers. Like Duplantis, Dollar has in the past pleaded with his followers, including those of his 30,000 member church, to donate money for his purchase of a plane. Though in Dollar’s instance it was for a Gulfstream G650.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Joel Osteen Quotes https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/joel_osteen Accessed on June 12, 2017.

⁷⁷ Creflo Dollar (August 12, 2018) <https://www.creflodollarministries.org/Bible-Study/Study-Notes/The-Covenant-of-Promise?returnUrl=%2FBible-Study%2FStudy-Notes>. Accessed on December 27, 2018.

⁷⁸ Leonardo Blair (November 8, 2018) <https://www.christianpost.com/news/creflo-dollar-withdrawals-god-heavenly-bank-account-19-month-bible-study.html>. Accessed on December 27, 2018.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Dollar can be quick to point out that the prosperity he preaches about is not limited to believers' finances, but rather "total life prosperity."⁸¹ Michael Luo, writing in a 2006 New York Times article about Creflo Dollar and the Prosperity Gospel explained, "The theology taps into the country's self-help culture."⁸² Luo went on to quote William C. Martin, a professor emeritus of religion and public policy at Rice University in Houston. "One of the goals of America is for you to become prosperous," he said. "For the church to put a blessing on that and say, 'God wants you to be rich,' is quite appealing."⁸³

Osteen has 8.6 million Twitter followers. Jesse Duplantis has 209,000 followers. Creflo Dollar has 737,000 followers. This shows the potential impact of their theological pronouncements, especially when one considers the geometric progression of posts that are retweeted by followers to each individual's followers.⁸⁴

Apocalyptic Millennialism

Millennialism is a theological construct which gives the believer permission to practice an unhealthy and theologically unsound understanding of dominion, which is the very definition of Dominionism. Millennialism may be defined as a belief held by some Christian denominations that there will be a Golden Age or Paradise on Earth in which Christ will reign for 1000 years prior to the final judgment and future eternal state (the

⁸¹ Michael Luo (January 15, 2006) <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/nyregion/preaching-a-gospel-of-wealth-in-a-glittery-market-new-york.html>. Accessed on December 27, 2018.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Per Twitter as of June 16, 2018. It is interesting to note that Osteen only follows 166 people as opposed to the 8.6M who follow him.

"World to Come" of the *New Heavens* and *New Earth*). This belief is derived primarily from Revelation 20:1–6.⁸⁵

This additional version of Dominion Theology misappropriates what is intended in the Genesis narratives about creation and humanity's place in that creation. God's intent is to be in communion with the whole of creation and for the human beings, who are created in the image of the Divine, to share with God in the caretaking of that creation. In the later chapters we will focus on God's intention for creation, especially as put forth in the Genesis 2 creation story.

Richard Landis explains some of the issues surrounding Millennialism:

The key determinant of millennialism's impact on society is timing. As long as the day of redemption is yet to come, millennial hopes console the suffering and inspire patience and political quiescence. Driven by a sense of imminence, however, believers in apocalyptic millennialism can become disruptive and even revolt against the sociopolitical order in an attempt to bring about the promised kingdom of peace.⁸⁶

The problem with millennialism, especially any form that also embraces apocalyptic leaning, is the possible complete disregard for the current world. Landis writes,

Believers find themselves at the centre of the ultimate universal drama in which their every act has cosmic significance. Cosmic messages appear in the smallest incident and in every coincidence. Moreover, the approach of the Endtime and the promise of a new world liberates believers from all earthly inhibitions; fears of corporeal authority vanish, and a wide range of repressed feelings—sexual, emotional, and violent—burst forth. Such a combination proves irresistible for many.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ New World Encyclopedia <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Millennialism>. Accessed August 20, 2017.

⁸⁶ Richard Landis, Millennialism, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/millennialism>. Accessed December 27, 2018.

⁸⁷ Ibid

We can come away with the sense that we are heavenly beings temporarily inhabiting a material world which is passing away, and therefore the world around us should not be our concern. The material world and our human frailties do not matter if we are just passing through. When proponents of these movements teach that humanity does not need to be concerned about this world because it is passing away, nor do we need to be concerned with nonbelievers who will be destroyed in the final day, they have lost sight first of all of God's desire that all should be saved.⁸⁸

We should also address briefly the rise of Environmental Millennialism which can be said to have its roots in the explosive arrival of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962. According to Robin Globus and Bron Taylor,

Silent Spring's principal aim was to warn Americans of the potentially catastrophic side effects of pesticides, which had become a booming industry in the post-World War II era. Employing apocalyptic language from the outset, the book opened by quoting Albert Schweitzer's warning, 'Man has lost the capacity to foresee and to forestall. He will end up destroying the earth' (Carson 2002/1962)⁸⁹

Globus and Taylor posit "Environmental Millennialists are united in the belief that we are in the midst of an anthropogenic environmental crisis."⁹⁰ They go on to write, "While different forms of environmental millennialism conceive of the crisis in different terms, two characteristics are common across the continuum: the use of scientific method to understand the prospect of apocalypse and belief in an indeterminate future." The

⁸⁸ 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9

⁸⁹ Robin Globus and Bron Taylor, "The Birth of the Environmental Movement" *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, Catherine Wessinger, ed. (New York, The Oxford University Press, 2011) 630.

⁹⁰ Ibid 635.

authors also point out two major narratives in dealing with the inevitable outcome of an environmental catastrophe. “In the first, human agency is affirmed and averting disaster is considered to be an obligation of paramount importance. In the second, more common among some radical environmentalists...catastrophe is seen as necessary before healing can take place.”⁹¹ I would argue that much of religious millennialism has no issue with the latter since the destruction of the world meets their use of the Book of Revelation as a blueprint for the end times and the fulfillment of God’s plan for creation.⁹²

The Dominion Mandate and Health Issues

We are all familiar with one form or another of faith healing ministries in the church. As recently as February 2018 a well-known Christian television evangelist proclaimed in a Facebook video that God, in the person of Jesus, has given us dominion over the flu, making flu shots not only unnecessary but perhaps even an act of faithlessness on the part of true believers.

Gloria Copeland, who along with her husband Kenneth, founded Kenneth Copeland Ministries in Texas, declared the flu vaccine unnecessary. CNN writer Maegan Vazquez wrote: “‘Well, listen, partners, we don't have a flu season,’ Minister Gloria Copeland said on a Facebook video for her church that was posted last week. ‘And don't receive (a flu shot) when somebody threatens you with, “Everybody's getting the flu.”’

⁹¹ Ibid 635.

⁹² See Rev. 21:1ff as a final statement on the necessity of the earth passing away before the fulfillment of God’s plan for all creation. “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

We've already had our shot: He bore our sicknesses and carried our diseases. That's what we stand on."⁹³

Vazquez's report continued, "By praying and saying 'I'll never have the flu. I'll never have the flu,' Copeland says followers can ward off the virus.... 'Inoculate yourself with the word of God.'

'Flu, I bind you off of the people in the name of Jesus,' she continued, adding, 'Jesus himself gave us the flu shot. He redeemed us from the curse of flu, and we receive it and we take it, and we are healed by his stripes, amen.'"⁹⁴

Vazquez also reported "In 2013, there was a measles outbreak in Texas that state officials tied to the Eagle Mountain International Church, which is run by Kenneth Copeland Ministries. At the time, the church was linking vaccinations to autism and teaching parents how to access vaccination exemption forms."⁹⁵

Ministers like Copeland, along with their followers, exhibit the health risks that can result from this particular form of Dominionism. A June 2018 NBC News story by Maggie Fox reported that at the time of her story there were 18 states that allow nonmedical vaccine exemptions with an increase of exemptions being granted in 12 of those states. Although not everyone who opts out of vaccines for their children do so on religious grounds, Fox reports, "a small but very vocal anti-vaccine movement has made use of social media and in-person rallies to spread doubt about the safety and efficacy of vaccines. They encourage state lawmakers to allow parents to opt out of vaccinating their

⁹³ Maegan Vazquez, February 7, 2018 <https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/07/politics/gloria-copeland-trump-adviser-flu-shot/index.html>. Accessed on December 31, 2018.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

kids not only for legitimate medical reasons but for religious or ‘philosophical’ reasons.”⁹⁶

Concluding Remarks

Genesis 1:26-28 does speak to God’s proclamation of humanity’s dominion over the rest of creation. This first chapters attempts to point out the obvious in many ways that humanity has abused this great responsibility through misuse and abuse of the environment as well as using poor exegetical and hermeneutical choices to support a theological rationale for exerting dominance over fellow human beings.

Lynn White, Jr. writes, “No creature other than man has ever managed to foul its nest in such short order.”⁹⁷ And while White’s comment is specific to how humanity has willfully damaged creation, his comment might also serve as a metaphorical understanding of how we have willfully damaged our relationships with God and each other – all of which is not inherent to the tradition.

This chapter has shown how humanity has created a theology of dominance based on both poor biblical scholarship as well as our own attitudes of human ego, greed, and the desire to dominate others. This chapter also serves as a jumping off point for Chapter Two which develops a more holistic and accurate understanding of the creation stories found in Genesis 1 and 2.

⁹⁶ Maggie Fox, June 15, 2018 <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/anti-vaccine-hotspots-rise-across-u-s-study-finds-n882461>. Accessed on December 31, 2018.

⁹⁷ Lynn White, Jr. “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis” *Science* 155, No. 3767 (March 10, 1967): 1204.

We will, then, move to articulating a better way of understanding our relationships with the created order, with each other as a part of that order, and with God, through the practice of *tikkun olam*, which is the ancient Jewish practice of repairing the world. Chapter Three expands on the practice of *tikkun olam* in contrast to the Dominion Mandate.

Chapter Two: Dominion: Reclaiming it, Renaming it, or Going Somewhere New?

A wave of theologians has arrived in the late twentieth to early twenty-first century calling for a rethinking of Dominionism. Much of this new wave of theology is tied to reclaiming a Biblical understanding of care for the whole of creation. Theologians such as Norman C. Habel understand the whole of creation as having equal footing before God. As stated earlier in Chapter One, Habel embraces a principle of “mutual custodianship” which “states that the Earth is a balanced and diverse domain in which responsible custodians can function as partners, rather than rulers, to sustain a balanced and diverse Earth community.”⁹⁸ Chapter two will provide examples of religious, scientific, and sociological approaches to reinterpreting the Biblical understanding of dominion.

Ellen F. Davis, Professor of Bible and Practical Theology at Duke Divinity School, challenges us to understand dominion as having to do with serving something we live with. Pointing to Genesis 2:15, where the newly formed humanity is placed in the garden, she explains that “the two verbs in [that verse] can be applied to working the soil....”⁹⁹ Davis translates the sense of verse 15 as a charge to both “‘keep’ the garden and at the same time ‘observe’ it, to learn from it and respect the limits that pertain to it.”¹⁰⁰ If such a meaning for God’s charge to the human being is accurate, then there is a need to temper how we understand words such as dominion (*rada*) and subdue (*kavash*)

⁹⁸ Norman C. Habel, “Is the Wild Ox Willing to Serve You? Challenging the Mandate to Dominate.” *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst, Eds. (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001) 179.

⁹⁹ Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2009) 30.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

found in Genesis 1:28. This is further illustrated by the way Davis translates 2:15: “And YHWH God took the human and set him in the Garden of Eden to work and serve it, to preserve and observe it.”¹⁰¹ Davis also points out, “Even in this (fleeting) narrative moment of life under ideal conditions, the human does not take priority over the land. Adam comes to Eden as a protector, answerable for the well-being of the precious thing that he did not make; he is to be an observer, mindful of the limits that are built into the created order as both inescapable and fitting.”¹⁰²

Revisioning Our Understanding of *Rada* and *Kavash* in Genesis 1:26-28:

The idea of humanity holding dominion over the created order in any way, shape, or form as named in Genesis 1:28 is inextricably tied to the pronouncement in 1:26 that humanity has been created in the image and likeness of God.¹⁰³ Humanity is free to exercise dominion over the creation only as it acts in concert with the will of God for the whole of creation. According to Davis, Genesis 1:28 can also be translated as having mastery “among” as opposed to “over,” however, no matter how we understand having mastery over creation, this mastery must be understood in the context of humanity created in the image of God (*běselem ‘elohîm*). “It would seem that conformity to the image of God is the single enabling condition for the exercise of ‘mastery’ among the creatures.”¹⁰⁴ This is further supported by the work of W. Gunther Plaut. Concerning being created in the image of God Plaut writes: “This likeness... describes our moral

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid 30-31.

¹⁰³ Gen. 1:26-28,note.

¹⁰⁴ Davis, 55.

potential. Our nature is radically different from God's, but we are capable of approaching God's actions: divine love, divine mercy, divine justice. We become truly human as we attempt to do godly deeds. The rabbis said: 'As God is merciful, so shall you be merciful; as God is just, so shall you be just.'"¹⁰⁵

And so, how we exercise dominion as given in Genesis 1:28 might be explored in how we understand unmarked and marked language in the Scriptures.¹⁰⁶ To do that we must clarify what we mean by unmarked and marked language. Unmarked language is the language of assumptions. Marked language points out the exception. For instance, in the mid-twentieth century, most cars were assumed to have a manual (stick-shift) transmission. In fact cars with a manual transmission were said to have a "standard" transmission, with an "automatic" transmission needing to be requested by the purchaser. So "manual" or "stick-shift" was the unmarked language for a transmission, while the marked language for a transmission was "automatic." Before the end of the century, an automatic transmission was assumed when purchasing a car. "Automatic" became the unmarked assumption for a transmission and one had to request a manual transmission if wanted. In 1960 one would have to ask for an automatic transmission, while later in the century a stick-shift, or manual transmission, would have to be requested.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the unmarked language of dominion assumes some form of stewardship or care for the land. We have already explored how Genesis 1:28 is essentially tied to humanity's being created in the image and likeness of God (1:26) and

¹⁰⁵ W. Gunther Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary, Revised Edition* (New York Union for Reform Judaism, 2005) 35.

¹⁰⁶ This example is based on my class notes from Dr. Rebecca Wright's June 2, 2015 lecture in her class "Enough: Limits and the Old Testament" and may contain specific language used by Dr. Wright.

therefore carrying out any form of dominion as one acting within the parameters of God's desire for the creation. Where dominion is marked in the Scriptures it is accompanied by God chastising humanity for acting out in roughshod or ruthless ways. Examples of marked language for dominion can be found in Leviticus 25 where dealing ruthlessly with one's kinsman is mentioned three times: verses 43, 46, and 53.¹⁰⁷ Likewise, Robert Alter's translation of the verses in Leviticus 25 condemn "holding crushing sway" over one's kinsmen. In the accompanying commentary, Alter points out the phrase he translates as "crushing sway" contains the same word for dominion as found in Genesis 1:26-28 (*radah*) and the same adverb used to describe "the harsh enslavement of the Hebrews by the Egyptians."¹⁰⁸

Considering verses where the word dominion is found have either the word by itself or the word with a harsh marker – either an adverb or an adjective – the word by itself is at least neutral. Dominion is used to mean something akin to stewardship in its preferred usage and is marked to connote exercising power over others.¹⁰⁹ In other words, it appears that according to the writers and editors of Leviticus, any form of dominion exercised in a way reminiscent of Egypt's oppressive regime is seen by God to be abusive and contrary to God's original intentions for humanity.

It should be noted, however, that scholars such as Walter Brueggemann are not ready to give up on the idea of dominion. Brueggemann understands dominion in Genesis 1:28 as fitting a definition of human beings acting as stewards of God's creation. "The

¹⁰⁷ "You shall not rule over [your kinsman] ruthlessly" (v. 43).

¹⁰⁸ The Hebrew Bible, Volume 1: The Five Books of Moses (New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 2019) translated by Robert Alter. Lev. 25:43. Note.

¹⁰⁹ Rebecca Wright, based on class notes.

human person in the image of God, like the image of a sovereign on a coin, is a representative and regent who represents the sovereign in the midst of all other subjects where the sovereign is not directly and personally present. This the human person is entrusted with ‘dominion’ (Gen. 1:28; Ps. 8:5-9).”¹¹⁰ Humanity, therefore, is meant to act “according to YHWH’s intention.”¹¹¹

Erasure-Testimony and The Creation Narratives

The work of Leah D. Schade might offer another way to look at the dominion passages in Genesis 1 using the Genesis 2 creation story as a lens. In her book, *Creation-Crisis Preaching: Ecology, Theology, and the Pulpit*, Schade builds on the work of John S. McClure’s description of erasure-testimony as a tool in deconstructing both the Biblical text and the sermon. Concerning the Biblical canon, McClure writes, “...through its deconstruction as scripture, the canon actually *erases* itself in order to release its adherents into the range of its others and to that which is otherwise than Being.”¹¹² McClure continues, “[The] canon of scripture, unlike the canon of Western philosophy or literature, *does not resist erasure*. In fact, there are clues within the text that this erasure is welcomed and celebrated.”¹¹³ By this McClure does not mean that Scripture is erased in the way we might envision the way a pencil eraser works. By erasure McClure means that scripture is “inherently deconstructive – and works against fixed forms of

¹¹⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: An Introduction*, (Nashville Abingdon Press 2008) 452.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 336.

¹¹² John S. McClure, *Other-wise Preaching: a postmodern ethic for homiletics* (St. Louis, Chalice Press, 2001) 25. As an aside, McClure uses the phrase “otherwise than Being” in referring to God. He writes, “Instead of referring to Being or the Ground of Being, words, as best, are traces of that which always remains otherwise than Being.” 79.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 25.

interpretation.”¹¹⁴ One side or the other of the binary equation between verses is not eradicated. Rather it is deconstructed, contextualized, or marginalized within the greater canon. The story or the passage is not eradicated. What is erased is any attempt at assigning a univocal hermeneutic in light of other interpretive possibilities. According to correspondence with McClure, rabbinic midrash with all of its diverse interpretations of scripture, also welcomes erasure.

One might see this in the ways that scripture argues against itself and tests our hermeneutic process. Scripture erases both its assumed testimony as well as reactive, resistive, or responsive counter-testimony.¹¹⁵ It can be seen, for example, in two side-by-side stories of creation which differ in how and in what order the world, human beings, and the other animals were created. Neither story is eliminated from the conversation, but both stories are impacted by how we see their context and the way they are each treated throughout the entire canon. It can also be seen in multiple stories of Abram’s/Abraham’s faith journey where Abram and Sarai break the pattern of staying close to the home of their clan and set out to an unknown land at the direction of an unknown God to form a new clan. The story of Job erases what was then conventional wisdom that surely Job’s terrible misfortune must have come about because he had sinned against God. Finally, the resurrection of Jesus erases the logic and the illusion that death is final and has power of all living things.

Exploring the interconnectedness of the whole creation, Schade points out that McClure “does not include other-than-human beings in the ‘others’ he considers.

¹¹⁴ McClure, Personal conversation on the topic.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

However, it is not a great stretch to extend his other-wise homiletic to include the other-than-human world of Creation.”¹¹⁶ Considering the fullness of creation, Schade suggests we bring into suspicion any definition of neighbor that is solely androcentric and anthropocentric; that is, seeing women and non-human creation as outside of neighbor. This erasure-testimony does not cause the human male portion of the binary to disappear. Rather both McClure’s and Schade’s aim “is to see that the dominant and oppressive assumptions that compromise our ethics are placed under suspicion or, in fact, subverted.”¹¹⁷

Considering some of the comments in sermons and writings discussed in the first chapter, we might expand Schade’s suggestion and bring into suspicion any definition of neighbor that sees not only women and non-human creation as outside neighbor but include issues of race, ethnicity, religious or non-religious belief and more.

Along the lines of previous comments, what if we were to place the account in Genesis 1:28 under suspicion in relationship to Genesis 2:15? This suspicion would not require the reader to discount or ignore dominion as defined in the first chapter of Genesis. However, it would disallow us making an assumption that only a particular class of humanity of humanity is created in the image and likeness of God, or that the sole purpose of the rest of creation is to serve humanity’s needs. Completely discounting Genesis 1:28 ignores a text that has been a part of our tradition for nearly twenty-four hundred years, while holding on to the Genesis 1 imagery without contextualizing at all runs the risk of our abuse of the command. Placing the passage under suspicion enhances

¹¹⁶ Leah D. Schade, *Creation-Crisis Preaching: Ecology, Theology, and the Pulpit* (St. Louis, Chalice Press, 2015) 65.

¹¹⁷ Leah D. Schade 65.

both our ability and our willingness to live into the image we believe to have been bestowed upon us at the dawn of creation. Erasure-testimony as put forward by McClure and Schade requires that we put the whole of canon into conversation as we seek to understand a more wholesome and holy definition of dominion.

Erasure-testimony tied to the creation stories affirms what we have stated before; that is we must look at dominion in light of what it means to work, serve, and preserve the garden and all that is within in it. Once we adopt the hermeneutic of both McClure and Schade we begin to understand that creation-centered relationships go beyond those of human-to-human and human-to-God. Building on the concept of a broader human-creation dynamic, Schade refers to the work of H. Paul Santmire. According to Schade, Santmire offers a modification of Martin Buber's "I-Thou" conceptuality.¹¹⁸ She writes,

Santmire proposes a third type of relation [along with 'I-It' and 'I-Thou'] he calls the 'I-Ens relation,' from the Latin participle for 'being.' The Ens, according to Santmire, has several characteristics that distinguish it from an It: its givenness, its mysterious activity or spontaneity, and its beauty, which exhibits its unity and diversity in an integrated whole. These characteristics evoke wonder in the person who encounters the Ens, whether that is a tree, a rock formation, or an undulating field of flowers.... Such wonder does not supplant the awe one experiences toward God, but rather helps us 'account for, and then in appropriate ways become advocates for, increasingly desirable relationships of mutuality and cooperation between persons and other creatures of nature.'¹¹⁹

Both creation stories in Genesis describe the whole of world coming into existence through the work of God. Hence, all of creation can be said to be creatures of God. Is it any wonder so many people describe experiences of meeting God in the midst of nature? Santmire and Schade both see inherent value in the whole of creation. Not only

¹¹⁸ Ibid 66.

¹¹⁹ Ibid 66-67.

that, they understand non-human creation to have agency. This, in part, is what they seem to mean when they use “Ens” to describe the relationship that part of creation shares with humanity and with God. Creation care must be a priority for humanity simply because we share our createdness with each other.

Referring to the work of Mark Wallace, Schade tells us the challenge for us is to recognize that how we exercise any sense of authority or dominion in the world impacts everything from what Wallace calls “megafauna such as human beings and blue whales” to what he calls “microflora such as mold spores and green algae.”¹²⁰ Bringing us back to the images of Genesis 2, we recognize that our “I-Ens” relationship with the whole of creation requires that we make decisions on how we live in this world from a bottom-up mindset rather than one that is top-down. Schade ties creation care to Jesus’ mandate to care for “the least of these,” putting their needs first:

In other words, if it’s not good for the children, the fish in the sea, or the microbes in the soil, an inverted pyramid of care dictates that it should not be done. Stated in a positive way, the ‘least of these’ are what Jesus has said are most sacred, so whatever promotes their health and well-being fulfills the divine command of caring for them.¹²¹

This immediately brings us back to the conflict with the theological and social teachings of Andrew Kulikovsky as addressed in chapter one. Kulikovsky, we may recall, placed humanity’s right to absolute control over creation above all other creatures, including flora and fauna, and above any concerns for the well-being of the oceans, lakes, streams, and air; stating that human procreation trumps plant and species extinction, and that God, who has granted us absolute dominion will basically clean up our mess behind

¹²⁰ Ibid 67.

¹²¹ Ibid 68.

us. As Kulikovsky writes, “Clearly, we are to take care of creation, but that does not mean that industrial and agricultural development should be stopped or severely restricted,” and he bases his comments on “the Christian belief in, and respect for, objective truth, and that human beings are God’s image bearers and the pinnacle of His creation.”¹²² Indeed, as one can see, Kulikovsky’s ethic for creation care is clearly based on a top-down model with humanity at the crown of the pyramid:

Environmentalists, both Christian and non-Christian, seem far too eager to make radical changes in environmental policy without any careful consideration of the impact on the lives of the people affected of those policy changes. Their demands for urgent action irrespective of the cost, both financial and in human life, appear, in many cases, to be motivated by a sense of moral superiority. Such people appear to be more interested in *feeling* good than actually *doing* good!¹²³

The importance of a broader understanding of neighbor that includes the non-human, “I-Ens,” elements of creation can be seen in two ongoing scientific studies involving insect populations on the one hand and the reintroduction of the grey wolf in Yellowstone National Park on the other. Both studies explore the reality of ecosystems when they are out of balance and the importance of restoring that balance.

Earlier in this century, scientists began to be alarmed at the decline of insect populations. Writing about studies on declining insect populations Gretchen Vogel explains:

Entomologists call it the windshield phenomenon. ‘If you talk to people, they have a gut feeling. They remember how insects used to smash on your windscreen,’ says Wolfgang Wägele, director of the Leibniz

¹²² Andrew S. Kulikovsky, Creation, preservation and dominion: part 3, A Christian approach to environmental issues, <https://dev.creation.com/creation-preservation-and-dominion-part-3>. Accessed on October 27, 2018.

¹²³ Ibid.

Institute for Animal Biodiversity in Bonn, Germany. Today, drivers spend less time scraping and scrubbing. ‘I’m a very data-driven person,’ says Scott Black, executive director of the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation in Portland, Oregon. ‘But it is a visceral reaction when you realize you don’t see that mess anymore....’ Though observations about splattered bugs aren’t scientific, few reliable data exist on the fate of important insect species. Scientists have tracked alarming declines in domesticated honey bees, monarch butterflies, and lightning bugs. But few have paid attention to the moths, hover flies, beetles, and countless other insects that buzz and flutter through the warm months.¹²⁴

If we were to follow the creation ethic of Kulikovsky such a study would not be alarming. After all, what’s a few insects – or even a slew of insects – worth in the grand scheme of human life? The problem with the thinking of scholars like Kulikovsky is their inability or unwillingness to understand the chain reaction that can take place with the loss of even one species.

Vogel reports that the introduction of neonicotinoid pesticides in the 1980s caused significant harm to the honeybee populations around the world, disrupting their ability to navigate and to communicate with each other. Vogel reports further that bird populations that feed on insects – swallows, larks, and swifts – are also showing steep declines. The common factor of the decline in each of these bird species is their diet.

But the loss of insects doesn’t impact just bird populations. The whole food chain gets disrupted. There are fewer birds for their natural predators, and so on up the chain. Fish that feed on insects feel the impact as well. Along with those aspects of the food chain the loss of bees, which includes whole species of bumble bees along with wasps and other species, impacts plant pollination.

¹²⁴ Gretchen Vogel, “Where have all the insects gone?” May 10, 2017, <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/05/where-have-all-insects-gone>. Accessed January 3, 2019.

In another article about the decline in insect populations Matthew Phelen reports that the increased number of roads and vehicles on those roads also have a negative impact. According to Phelen:

It's what Sussex University biologist Dave Goulson recently called an 'ecological armageddon' in a *Guardian* piece — and the ramifications do indeed ripple out: Birds starve without enough bugs to eat. Cow patties linger in fields without dung beetles to break them down and recycle the nitrogen back into the soil. Humanity has pushed global insect populations to the brink of extinction via climate change and hazardous pesticides, of course, but also in another relatively unexamined way: We hit too many bugs with cars.¹²⁵

Again, as with the loss of insects, we might say, “What’s a few flowers,” but we cannot forget the impact on lost pollinators to our entire plant-based food supply. In the end, Kulikovsky’s top-down creation ethic falls apart because we run the risk of having nothing at the bottom of the pyramid to support the top!

While not driven by the work of creation ethicists such as Santmire or Schade, the wisdom of an “I-Ens” approach to creation care can also be seen in the results of reintroducing the grey wolf to Yellowstone National Park. A staff report from the park written in June 2011 spells out the significant positive ecological the reintroduction as brought about.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Matthew Phelen, “Humans Are Killing All the Bugs and it’s About Time to Get Worried About It: From climate change to car windshields, it’s a tough time to be a bug.” June 19, 2018, <https://www.inverse.com/article/46133-slooshing-and-splattng-of-bugs-on-winshields-nontrivial-scientists-say>. Accessed January 3, 2019.

¹²⁶ Brodie Farquhar, “Wolf Reintroduction Changes Ecosystem.” June 21, 2011, <https://www.yellowstonepark.com/things-to-do/wolf-reintroduction-changes-ecosystem>. Accessed on January 3, 2019.

According to Doug Smith, a wildlife biologist in charge of the Yellowstone Wolf Project, “the presence of wolves triggered a still-unfolding cascade effect among animals and plants-one that will take decades of research to understand.” The changes to plant life in Yellowstone has even had a positive impact on non-living things such as stream beds. Flood plains increase creating pools that invite living organisms. Stream bank erosion has been curtailed. Strengthened tree stands create canopies of foliage which offers habitats for birds and helps keep the streams healthy.¹²⁷

Prior to their reintroduction in 1995 the last of the Yellowstone wolves were killed off in the 1930s. The wolves were an important part of the ecosystem, helping keep the elk population in balance. While grizzly bears, cougars, and even coyotes to some extent, still preyed upon the elk, the loss of the wolves took pressure off the elk population. Over the years the elk population exploded beyond the capacity of Yellowstone to support them without the ecosystem being totally disrupted.

This in itself seems harmless. What’s a few more elk? Without the pressure to be on the move as much, especially in the winter, willow stands, aspen, and cottonwood took a big hit. Beavers need willow in order to survive the winter. According to Smith, wolves cause elk to be on the move throughout the winter

With elk on the move during the winter, willow stands recovered from intense browsing, and beaver rediscovered an abundant food source that hadn't been there earlier. As the beavers spread and built new dams and ponds, the cascade effect continued, said Smith. Beaver dams have multiple effects on stream hydrology. They even out the seasonal pulses of runoff; store water for recharging the water table; and provide cold, shaded water for fish, while the now robust willow stands provide habitat

¹²⁷ David Frey, “Study shows Yellowstone wolves’ impact on streams,” November 30, 2018 <http://wildlife.org/study-shows-yellowstone-wolves-impact-on-streams/> Accessed on March 1, 2019.

for songbirds. ‘What we're finding is that ecosystems are incredibly complex,’ [Smith] said.¹²⁸

Smith highlights further that the rebound of the beaver population in Yellowstone may also have been impacted by events such as “the 1988 Yellowstone fires, the ongoing drought, warmer and drier winters and other factors yet to be discovered.”¹²⁹

It is also important to point out that since the wolves made their return to Yellowstone many ranchers living around the park have protested the wolves’ return. By nature wolves claim wide-ranging territories and cannot read park maps. Ranchers have lost cattle and sheep to far-ranging wolves. A recent decision to allow the seasonal hunting of wolves outside the park has seemed to help ease the friction between environmentalists and ranchers.

The reintroduction of the grey wolf, along with the ongoing Yellowstone study of that event, gives us a reverse model of what is happening with the insect population around the world. By caring for “the least” among us the ecosystem of Yellowstone Park has been changed for the better. “In Yellowstone, biologists have the rare, almost unique, opportunity to document what happens when an ecosystem becomes whole again, what happens when a key species is added back into the ecosystem equation.”¹³⁰

Concluding Remarks

The side-by-side creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 challenge us to understand the idea of dominion in light of both. The words *rada* and *kavash* are often used throughout the Old Testament to imply harsh, despotic rule, which is used by

¹²⁸ Brodie Farquhar.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ ibid

Dominionists to support their theologies of power and control. As we take a closer look at the context surrounding both creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 we begin to understand that domination and subjugation are the exceptions to God's desire for human interaction. We must allow the older creation story of Genesis 2 to cast suspicion on how we interpret the story in Genesis 1. Perhaps the reason both significantly different creation stories were retained by Biblical redactors to allow us to better understand our place in creation as creatures of God and not as gods ourselves.

As beings created in the image and likeness of God our interactions with one another and the rest of the created order around us must be understood in the light of that likeness. As the author of Leviticus reminds us, we are to be holy as God is holy.¹³¹ The author of 1 Peter reminds us of the same command.¹³² When we look at both the violent and benevolent impacts of humanity on the world around us hopefully we begin to understand there must be a better way to live, move, and have our being in this world. The ancient practice of *tikkun olam* as it has evolved in this age may well be a redeeming answer to how we treat one another and how we treat this world.

¹³¹ Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 20:7.

¹³² 1 Pet. 1:16.

Chapter Three: Embracing a Hermeneutic of *Tikkun Olam*

During a five-week period beginning with the Third Sunday after the Epiphany St. Paul's hosted a sermon series challenging listeners to embrace the practice of *tikkun olam* rather the "Dominion Mandate" which has been defined as humanity's perceived right, or rather the right of certain humans, to dominate the whole of creation, including certain other human beings. While the idea of dominion as put forth in Genesis 1:28 may be redeemed, it will always be open to misinterpretation and misuse by those who have a mind to do so. I submit that a hermeneutic of *tikkun olam* makes a strong stand against the abuses inherent in theologies embracing the "Dominion Mandate."

"The concept of *tikkun olam*, literally meaning 'repairing the world,' reflects a core Jewish value that identifies with a particularly Jewish higher or greater responsibility and that has manifested in various ways throughout the course of Jewish civilization."¹³³ It may be defined in part as "The process of fixing large societal problems, while maintaining a greater belief that our actions can have a positive effect on the greater human and divine world."¹³⁴

Tikkun olam is theological: It has to do with how we understand the world as part of God's created order, and the vast relationship we share with nature as fellow creatures. *Tikkun olam* is social: It has to do with how we relate to one another as a part of the whole human race – how we do or do not uphold the dignity of every human being and treat one another with respect. *Tikkun olam* is environmental: It has to do with how we treat the world around us. Finally, *Tikkun olam* is political: It has to do with how we

¹³³ <http://reut-institute.org/en/Publication.aspx?PublicationId=4064>, accessed on November 29, 2018.

¹³⁴ Jill Jacobs, "The History of 'Tikkun Olam'" Zeek, <http://www.zeek.net/706tohu/index.php?page=2Rabbi> accessed July 7, 2017. Rabbi Jill Jacobs is the Director of Education for the Jewish Funds for Justice (JFSJ).

order our society in ways that safeguard one another and the whole of creation – the laws and regulations we pass that either bring about wholeness or brokenness in the world around us.

I propose embracing *tikkun olam* as an alternative to the Dominion Mandate in this exercise rather than the tradition gospel metaphors of kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God not because the concept of *tikkun olam* is different from kingdom language or better than kingdom language, but because it carries with it an inherent sense of action that we too often don't allow the kingdom metaphors to hold. Along those same lines, all too often our tradition has ignored the subversive nature of kingdom in the teachings of Jesus. We end up creating spiritualized walls around our understanding of the kingdom, and so the use of *tikkun olam* may allow us to hear the kingdom language of Jesus with new ears.

According to Elliott Dorff, the “ultimate goal in *tikkun olam* is...a world at peace. That...does not mean just a cessation of hostilities. It also means a world in which we have the blessings of...prosperity, health, procedural and substantive justice, recognition of Israel’s God and of Torah values as authoritative, and peace.”¹³⁵ One only need look at Jesus’ teaching as put forward in both the Sermon on the Mount (considering especially the Beatitudes) and the Sermon on the Plain (considering especially the Blessings and the Woes) to see how his imagery of holy community and the long unfolding concept of *tikkun olam* relate, examples of which will be reviewed later in this chapter.¹³⁶ One can

¹³⁵ Elliot N. Dorff, *The Way Into Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World)* (Nashville: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005) p. 249

¹³⁶ Matthew 5:1-11 and Luke 6:20-26 The Jewish Annotated New Testament (All NT references are from this version unless otherwise noted)

certainly find both calls to action and promises of peace and wholeness throughout the life and ministry of Jesus.

Perhaps one place to begin the work of *tikkun olam* is by eschewing any endorsement of the dominion mandate and by working for peace in our own lives, in our churches and communities, and in the wider world. Peace, as it is understood in terms of *tikkun olam* means much more than the absence of conflict, or in this instance, the desire and action of exhibiting dominion over others and over the created order. Peace, or *shalom*, is meant to imply health, wholeness, integrity, and holiness. Rabbi Elliot Dorff points to our participation in *shalom*. He writes,

[We cannot] rest by asking God to bring peace; we must do what we can as well. In fact, based on the verse from Psalms, ‘seek peace and pursue it’ (Psalm 34:15), the Rabbis declare that the commandment to seek peace is unlike any other in that we do not do it only when the occasion arises but must rather go out of our way to find ways to make peace... Rabbis maintain that peace is an underlying condition for all other blessings and that God’s Name is thus associated with peace... The law does not order you to run after or pursue the other commandments, but only to fulfill them on the appropriate occasion. ***But peace you must seek*** in your own place and pursue it even to another place as well (Jerusalem Talmud, *Peah* 1:1[4a])¹³⁷

To expand on Dorff’s teaching, *tikkun olam* is a holy calling that cannot be put to the side until it’s convenient. Practicing *tikkun olam* will rarely, if at all, ever be convenient. I suspect few, if any at all, in the pages of Holy Scripture ever found God’s call to proclaim the need for repentance and reconciliation on the part of God’s people something to be immediately embraced. Moses claimed lack of status and eloquence in a

¹³⁷ Elliot N. Dorff, *The Way Into Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World)* (Nashville: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005) p. 246.

long discourse with God as he tried to dodge his calling.¹³⁸ Isaiah felt unworthy due to his sinfulness, and Jeremiah due to his youth.¹³⁹ Saul of Tarsus had to be knocked off his horse and struck blind before he would hasten to God's call.¹⁴⁰ Even Jesus would have his moments of doubt and debate in the garden and on the cross.¹⁴¹ Yet each one pursued reconciliation and wholeness wherever it took them.

***Tikkun Olam* invites care for the whole of creation**

The Rev. Allan McCaslin told an Old Testament class the following story:

“No Grandman (sic). That's the *world's* problem, *not* ours!” Such was the emphatic answer my 7 year old granddaughter offered when asked if her school, *Calvary Christian Academy* in Forest City, Arkansas, was teaching recycling and stewardship of the earth. Her answer reflected a common misunderstanding among many evangelicals that “this world is *not* our home” and, therefore, we have no responsibility to it. Sadly, additional questions about Christian responsibility for the care of the needy and poor of society received a similar answer.

My Granddaughter's responses reflect a common ill-conceived so-called Christian theology of biblical environmental responsibilities. Specifically, what it means to “have dominion” over the earth and what it means to embrace our God-given, *God-ordained*, role as keepers of “this fragile earth, our island home.”¹⁴²

In the end, care for the land as well as care for one another is our spiritual duty.

Any theology that discounts the importance of caring for our world must be suspect.

Even if we believe ourselves to be aliens in this world waiting for spiritual fulfillment in the next part of eternity lack of care for this world makes no sense. Will our social and

¹³⁸ Gen. 3:11.

¹³⁹ Is. 6:5 and Jer. 1:6.

¹⁴⁰ Acts 9:1-9.

¹⁴¹ Mt. 26:38-39 and Mt. 27:46.

¹⁴² Alan McCaslin, story told during our 2017 D. Min. class, *People of the Land*.

environmental apathy suddenly be transformed upon leaving this mortal coil? How do indifferent or abusive actions on our part prepare us for spiritual perfection? Why would we pray for the coming of God's reign on earth with one breath, and then dismiss the world in the next? According to Pope Francis, the ecological crisis and our social and political crises for that matter are not technological problems. Rather, they spring from a spiritual problem. "Once the human being declares independence from reality and behaves with absolute dominion, the very foundations of our life begin to crumble...."¹⁴³ It's not about fixing a thing. As Pope Francis reminds us, "Merely technical solutions run the risk of addressing symptoms and not the more serious, underlying problems."¹⁴⁴ When we ignore underlying root causes we run the risk of ending up in an endless loop of doing environmental and relation triage while ignoring the disease.

The theology behind the practice of *tikkun olam* is about repairing the whole of creation from the inside out. Rather than simply practicing triage, treating the world's wounds to stop the immediate danger, but leaving the hard work of healing the brokenness that causes the wounds, we are called to a more holistic approach. *Tikkun olam* is about seeing the world around us from a relational point of view, calling us to both a personal conversion and the transformation of the world. That is, while it is a good thing to pull drowning people out of a rushing river, at some point in time we need to be willing to go upstream and find out why so many people either keep falling in the river or keep getting thrown in the river, thereby being able to address the root cause.

¹⁴³ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care For Our Common Home* (Vatican City, Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2015) 117.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid* 144.

God commands us to care. We do not have the right to do whatever we want with whatever we have. As the prophet Isaiah proclaims, “Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you, and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land.”¹⁴⁵ When we live as if we are the only important being in the world, we build fences around the edges and corners of our fields, cutting off our neighbor, the poor, and the sojourner, and breaking covenant with our God.

Pope Francis reminds us “Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself... Disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbor...ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God, and with the earth.”¹⁴⁶

The teaching of *tikkun olam* can be further illustrated with two connected passages of scripture; one coming from the Gospel According to Matthew (with parallels in Mark and John), and the other from the Book of Deuteronomy. The passage from Matthew comes during the week before the arrest of Jesus. While Jesus is at the house of Simon the leper an unknown woman comes in and anoints his feet with costly oil. The disciples become angry with the woman because they think the oil should have been sold instead and the money used to help the poor. Jesus responds, “Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Isa. 5:8.

¹⁴⁶ Pope Francis 66.

¹⁴⁷ Mt. 26:6-11 (see also, Mk. 14:7 and Jn. 12:8).

I have long heard this story, especially the last verse (Mt 26:11), misinterpreted in a way that surreptitiously gives credence to the Dominion Mandate. As part of a conservative religious movement in my undergraduate college days (Campus Crusade for Christ) we were told that even Jesus realized there will always be poor among us and that poverty is inevitable. In my case, that meant spending my time trying to evangelize my fellow students rather than spending too much time working toward eradicating poverty.

I believe Jesus knew better than that. His words had more to do with his impending crucifixion, and I believe a more faithful interpretation would be a charge to his disciples to pay attention to what is happening in front of them in the moment – the incredible work that God is about to do in and through Jesus – and that afterwards they will need to continue their ministry to the poor and the needy once again.

Jesus, who was a Torah observant Jew, was familiar with his scriptures. And that is where the passages from Deuteronomy come into play. Moses, speaking on behalf of God, directs his people, “There shall be no needy among you – since the Lord your God will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a hereditary portion – if only you heed the Lord your God and take care to keep all this Instruction that I enjoin upon you this day.”¹⁴⁸

Moses goes on to say that whenever there is a needy kinsmen among the people, they should not “harden” their hearts against the one in need. As a people who had recent memories of Egypt, the command to not harden their hearts would bring back memories of how Pharaoh had treated them. Moses goes on, “For there will never cease to be needy

¹⁴⁸ Dt. 15:4-5.

ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and the needy kinsman in your land.”¹⁴⁹

The language of Deuteronomy helps clarify the words of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, and John. Furthermore, we can tie that language from Deuteronomy to language in Leviticus 19 about care for the neighbor and the foreigner to Jesus’ parable about the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25. In the parable the king honors those who had ministered to him when he was hungry, thirsty, and a stranger, as well as when he was naked, sick, and in prison. Those attending the king ask, “When did we do that for you?” As Jesus reminds us, “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”¹⁵⁰ This is *tikkun olam*. This is about repairing the breach in society brought about by poverty rather than ignoring it and saving money and power in the meanwhile.

Repairing the world

An early version of an Education for Ministry (EFM) Common Lesson offered the following account:

The story is told of an old Navajo woman who sits silently at her loom weaving as the generations before her had done. She has spent a lifetime working her loom, and she carries out her work without a second thought. Her mind travels elsewhere while her fingers dance with the yarn, creating a sacred rug pattern as she weaves. As images in her heart and mind find a place on the rug, they also carry her thoughts into a daydream.

Our lives are like this rug. We are formed by the Cosmic Woman who makes this world on her loom. Each of us becomes as she weaves us into her Earth Rug. The various colors and textures interrelate to tell the stories of our lives and of this world. Each of us has a place. Each of us contributes to the whole. Nothing is unintended. All have a purpose.

¹⁴⁹ Dt. 15:7-11.

¹⁵⁰ Mt. 25:31-46.

When the woman awakens from her daydream she discovers the Cosmic Woman's Earth Rug story has been woven into her rug. Her rug tells the story of her people and their history, and she realizes that her story is but a part of the greater story of Creation.¹⁵¹

The story of the Navajo woman reminds us of our need to live as a people inextricably connected with each other and our world. I suspect the reason why so many people are drawn to various spiritual practices of the First Nations is their unerring sense of the interconnectedness of all things. *Tikkun olam* speaks to us of that connectedness.

There is an exercise I have led several times with youth groups and more recently with the St. Paul's Vestry. Five or more participants (depending on the size of the group) stand in a circle holding up a small ring. Attached to each ring is a large ball of yarn. The remaining participants line up behind each person holding a ring. The narrator reads, one at a time, a series of actions. Each event depicts an act of creating relationship (e.g. "Your Youth Group raises money to buy and plant trees on the Church campus."). Each person holding a ball of yarn is then told to "weave a portion of the web." As each statement is read participants cross back and forth through the center of the circle and loop their yarn around another ring. Soon an intricate yarn web fills the center of the circle.

The narrator then reads out several relationship-breaking actions, one at a time. With the reading of each act the narrator cuts a strand of the web. After several actions have been described the damage to the web is obvious. The group then begins talking about what must be done to repair the web. With each suggested path toward reconciliation and repair two of the cut threads are tied back together. Upon completion

¹⁵¹ "Your Personal History: Recommended for Common Lesson One, Year D" *Education for Ministry Common Lessons and Supporting Materials* (Sewanee, TN, September 1998) 1-4-1.

of the exercise the web is once again whole, even if it still bears the scars of the struggle to be faithful.

This exercise tells us our own truth about the Navajo woman's rug as it connects to our lives and to the life of the world around us. This is *tikkun olam*. This is repairing the world. This is repairing the breach. This is healing and wholeness at work in our lives.

Borrowing from the essence of the prayer, “*For the Church*” on page 816 of *The Book of Common Prayer*, we pray:

Gracious and holy God; we pray for all your people as we seek to live in relationship with one another and with you. We pray that where our world and our relationships are corrupt, we may be purified; where we are in error, direct us where we are in any of our ways amiss, and make us whole. Where we do practice *tikkun olam* in our lives, strengthen us; where there is want in this world, help us provide; where we disagree with one another, teach us to talk with one another and compromise; for the sake of Jesus Christ your son. Amen.¹⁵²

What is behind the call to *tikkun olam*?

Let us take a few minutes to further define *tikkun olam*. As stated earlier in this chapter, *tikkun olam* embraces the whole of one's life. And because *tikkun olam* speaks to the theological, social, environmental, and political expressions of our lives, we are constantly called to its practice.

According to Charles Fenyvesi, one of his kabbalist ancestor's fundamental beliefs “was in the need to pursue *tikkun olam*, the duty of a Jew as defined in the sixteenth century by the incomparable kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria Ashkenazi, better known as the Holy Ari. According to him, improving or, as others translate it, restoring

¹⁵² Book of Common Prayer p. 816.

the world is the first kabbalistic commandment because *tikkun* means restoring the original wholeness that Creation itself shattered.”¹⁵³ The kabbalah, referred to by some as “the soul of *Torah*,” is an ancient Jewish tradition which “teaches the deepest insights into the essence of G-d, His interaction with the world, and the purpose of Creation.”¹⁵⁴ In essence, we can see how Jewish mysticism can be so deeply connected to the concept of the healing of creation.

Basically, *tikkun olam* calls us to read Genesis 1:28 in the light of both 1:26, whereby humanity is created in the image and likeness of the Divine, and Genesis 2:15, where humanity is placed in the garden to till it, care for it, observe it, and protect it. Genesis 1:28 would have been read by Israel in the fuller context of both creation stories. As we mentioned in chapter 1, that which we have translated as “to have dominion” can also be translated as “to serve.” This makes sense in light of the Biblical understanding of humanity’s place in the Garden, where the first human beings were placed to till and to keep a garden that belonged not to them, but to God.

We are called by God to understand both *rada* and *kavash* as *servicing something you live with*. Earlier we discussed unmarked and marked language. Unmarked language is what we assume. Marked language is the exception. Unmarked language dealing with dominion has to do with care for the whole of creation, or what some term as stewardship. Therefore dominion in Biblical terminology was assumed as care for creation or our stewardship of creation.

¹⁵³ Charles Fenyvesi, “Practical Kabbalah: A Family History” *Ecology & the Jewish Spirit: Where Nature & the Sacred Meet*, First Edition (Nashville, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000) p 75.

¹⁵⁴ Yerachmiel Tilles, “What is Kabbalah?...And Why? (No date given) https://www.chabad.org/kabbalah/article_cdo/aid/380664/jewish/What-is-Kabbalah-And-Why.htm. Accessed on August 15, 2017.

Furthermore, since we serve the creation as beings created in the image and likeness of the Creator (Genesis 1:26), we are called to treat the creation as would the Creator. While “stewardship” has been seen as a modern term to use for our relationship to God’s creation, there are some who see that symbol as still holding on to a sense of power and entitlement in how we deal with the world. For instance, Norman Wirzba writes,

The symbol of the steward, at least in the popular imagination, maintains a notion that human beings are in control, and so stewardship stands in stark contrast to other environmental approaches that stress a more egalitarian view. Stewardship recognizes that people have unique powers and responsibilities that equip them for the role of management of the earth. In affirming the species superiority of humans it can thus make it easier for us to live with a history of exploitation, since all we need acknowledge is that our domination has at times gone astray.¹⁵⁵

As an alternative, Servant Leadership – that is, power with as opposed to power over one another and the creation – is another way of looking at dominion as seen in the first two chapters of Genesis. Wirzba continues,

Servanthood corrects our ideas about dominion in terms of the well-being of others rather than as self-benefit. Servants suspend their own desires, not out of tyrannical pressure or the loss of self-worth, but so that the flourishing of others and the whole creation can occur. This is a unique capacity that is unparalleled in any other species.¹⁵⁶

Granted, Wirzba draws a fine line between servanthood and stewardship. His greatest concern is against humanity being overcome with hubris and considering our unique capacity as license to abuse. Using the metaphor of steward, it is often difficult to separate the authority of the steward from the authority of the Divine – the desire to care

¹⁵⁵ Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2003) 130.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid 140.

for creation from the need to control. Our “unique capacity” to allow “the flourishing of others” also entails a unique capacity to cause incredible damage to the world, or even unmake creation.

Servanthood, on the other hand, always takes into account the needs of the other, whether we are considering fellow human beings or the whole of the created order. Wirzba points to the struggle between domination and servanthood in the differences between the Priestly account of creation in Genesis 1 and the Yahwist account in Genesis 2.¹⁵⁷ And so one can see how Wirzba might agree with earlier comments from Norman C. Habel and his views of “mutual custodianship.”

***Tikkun olam* and our Baptismal Covenant**

Tikkun olam, therefore, invites us to ask ourselves many questions, two of the most important of which are: 1. How do we see God acting toward creation? 2. How do we as humans mirror or reject that action? For Episcopalians, our Baptismal Covenant offers us answers.

The last two questions of our Baptismal Covenant, along with a sixth question developed by The Rev. Lorraine Ljunggren while serving at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Raleigh, NC, speak specifically to how human beings live out their lives in relationship with each other and with the rest of creation. Ljunggren revised the covenant, placing the important words of promise on the lips of those renewing their vows. The final two questions, along with the sixth, new question, follow:

***Celebrant:* How will you follow Christ in your daily life?**

¹⁵⁷ Ibid 133.

People: With God's help, by seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving my neighbor as myself.

***Celebrant:* How will you participate in God's redemptive work?**

People: With God's help, by striving for justice and peace among all people, and by respecting the dignity of every human being.

***Celebrant:* How will you cultivate reconciliation between human beings and God's created order?**

People: With God's help, by working for the just and proper stewardship of God's creation, caring for the land, the water, the air, and all creatures and all living things in this world.

The concept of *tikkun olam*, when practiced as Christians, is inextricably bound to our baptismal covenant. In the version just read, care for one another as fellow human beings, as well as care for the world, are obvious to our calling as followers of Jesus. The second promise, not listed, reminds us that we will inevitably fail at caring for ourselves, our neighbors, and this world. The call to “repent and return to the Lord” undoubtedly echoes the theology behind *tikkun olam*. In addition to looking at our Baptismal Covenant as a blueprint for practicing *tikkun olam*, two passages from Paul's letters to the churches in Rome and Corinth offer additional insights on how humanity is to live in faithful, life-giving, relationships with God and with one another. Specifically we look to Romans 12:1-20 and 1 Corinthians 12 to better understand how Paul's teaching and the practice of *tikkun olam* connect. The following observations on Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 are

based on my notes taken in a class led by Rebecca Wright during a summer Advanced Degree Program in 2017.¹⁵⁸

Romans 12:1-20

When Paul begins this chapter telling his readers to not be conformed to the world it should be noted that Paul is not dismissing the physical world itself. Recall that in Genesis 1 God calls this world “good.” Rather, Paul begins by telling us not to be conformed to the age in which we live; that is, do not be conformed to the age, culture, or operating systems with which we’re confronted. Paul challenges us to be perfect, and by that he means that we should have integrity. That is, what people see on the outside should reflect what’s on the inside.

When Paul tells his readers that their love should be genuine he is not talking about the mushy, gooey, love of Hallmark Cards and romance movies. For Paul, who will say much more about love in his letter to the Corinthians, love equals loyalty, and it implies interdependence within the community of faith. But love is not without its challenges.

In verse 12 Paul writes, “Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.” The world is not perfect nor are human beings perfect. The transformation Paul talks about in verse 2 is an ongoing process.

Verse 13 and following is where the rubber of *tikkun* language hits the road. In telling his readers to ‘contribute to the needs of the saints,’ and to “extend hospitality to

¹⁵⁸ People of the Land, Class notes based on a lecture by Dr. Rebecca Wright (notes are paraphrased from the lecture in places and likely unintentionally interpreted)

strangers,” Paul is echoing a portion of the commands of God’s Holiness Code found in Leviticus 19. Verse 19:18 gives the command to love our neighbor as ourselves. Verses 33-34 expand the command to love beyond the neighbor to the *gerim*, that is, the sojourners or aliens living in the midst of Israel. “When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”¹⁵⁹

Likewise, it should be inferred that Paul extends the command to love one’s neighbor to include one’s enemies:

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.... No, ‘if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink....’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”¹⁶⁰

Paul’s admonition to the Church in Rome is reminiscent of Jesus’ words from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus taught his disciples, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your

¹⁵⁹ Taken from class notes

¹⁶⁰ Rom. 12:14-21

Father in heaven....”¹⁶¹ Paul’s teaching is also reminiscent of the parable of the Sheep and the Goats offered by Jesus in Matthew 25.¹⁶²

1 Corinthians 12

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul is brilliant in finding a metaphor that shows unity without uniformity. Christianity is unity, not competition. Everyone has a legitimate part within the body, which is Christ; and when one part of the body hurts, the whole body notices. Commenting along the lines of Paul’s metaphor Ragan Sutterfield writes, “...when we are fully human we are members of a body, not bodies unto ourselves.”¹⁶³ Practicing *tikkun olam* reminds us that we are all partners in creation, and that we share that identity with one another rather than over one or the other.

Sutterfield then makes the jump to the entire ecosystem. “If Paul were writing today, he could easily have used the metaphor of ecology – another system in which each part works toward the health of the whole.... For the kingdom of God to work we must have the dung beetles and the elephants – it is a mistake of valuation to place one above the other.”¹⁶⁴

Tikkun olam, then, works as a way of hearing traditional Christian language with new ears. Paul’s teachings in Romans and his first letter to the Corinthians not only embraces the teachings of Jesus handed down to him, but they also offer us a practical

¹⁶¹ Mt. 5:43-45a

¹⁶² Mt. 25:31-46

¹⁶³ Ragan Sutterfield, *Cultivating Reality: How the Soil Might Save Us* (Eugene, OR, Cascade Press, 2013) 42

¹⁶⁴ *ibid*

guide to practicing *tikkun olam*. The lessons from these passages may also serve to remind us that both Jesus and Paul did not create their preaching and teaching out of whole cloth, but that their wisdom is fully steeped in the roots of their Jewish faith.

Concluding Remarks

Tikkun olam finds its roots in ancient Jewish tradition. But since Jesus and his earliest followers were faithful, Torah observant Jews, their teaching finds its roots in the same traditions. *Tikkun olam* is a practice meant to impact the whole of our lives; touching the theological, social, environmental, and political aspects of how we live together in community and how we live in faithful relationship with God. Practicing *tikkun olam* calls us to renounce practices of domination and embrace working for peace. Such practice calls us to understand our common bond with all of humanity, recognizing the image of God within one another. It calls us to recognize our common bond to the whole of creation and our high calling to care for all that God has created.

Finally, Chapter Four will include a five-part sermon series embracing a hermeneutic of *tikkun olam* as a way of addressing the primary issues identified in this chapter.

Chapter Four: Preaching *Tikkun Olam*

Chapter four consists of a five-week sermon series on preaching *tikkun olam* offered at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Smithfield, North Carolina. The series began on the Third Sunday after the Epiphany (January 27, 2019) and concluded on the Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany (February 24, 2019). The first two sermons and the last two sermons were written by the author of this paper. The sermon for the Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany (February 10, 2019) was written and delivered by Stephen A. Jurovics, author of *Hospitable Planet: Faith, Action, and Climate Change*.

Chapter Five will include theological and homiletical reflection and analysis on the five sermons.

Sermon 1: Epiphany 3, Year C (Luke 4:14-21; Isaiah 61:1-2a) Repairers of the Breach

An introductory note to the sermon: As we have mentioned above, for many the dominion mandate includes the right of certain acceptable people to have dominion over other human beings. The motivation may be based on one or more significant bases: race, gender, social and/or economic status, religious affiliation, and more. This sermon points to the radical inclusion of all people by Jesus.

Sermon text: The time was 537 years Before the Common Era of Judaism and Christianity. The peasant majority of Judah – the “people of the land” – had been left behind while the upper class, the landed aristocracy, priests, scribes, and merchants were exiled to Babylon. Many of the exiled people of Jerusalem have now found their way back home – only to find the city and their homes in disrepair or ruin. The powerful and glorious promises of Second Isaiah – the prophet who had spoken to them of restoration

during their time in exile – the promises of Second Isaiah seem faded, distant, tarnished and untrue. Their lives and their world are in complete disrepair.

The wealthiest of those returning – those who had managed to hold onto their possessions in exile, or who had found ways to build wealth in Babylon – they are finding ways to rebuild their homes and start new lives. The poor and the disenfranchised – the descendants of those who had nothing to begin with – those whose families had been taken advantage of and mistreated before the exile – they find themselves in the same old boat – barely keeping afloat, barely keeping alive – once again under the thumb of the upper class, and wondering what ever became of the God who had brought their ancestors up out of Egypt. For most certainly, the poor and the disenfranchised feel trapped by a domination system not at all unlike what their ancestors experienced under Pharaoh.

It is not uncommon for people finding their lives in turmoil and world crashing down around their heads to look for someone or something to save them. Created in the image and likeness of God, we know that life – that the whole of creation – is supposed to be something other than what it often shows itself to be. Israel, in exile and upon their return, seeks hope in their experiences with a God who has always been an active participant in the life of their nation. And so the prophet we call Third Isaiah – prophet of the return from exile – speaks as one anointed by God, proclaiming a message of comfort and consolation, and the promise of God’s favor for those who had nowhere else to turn. Isaiah proclaims, “Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations

of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.”¹⁶⁵

And then the prophet continues, “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; God has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor....¹⁶⁶ And in another place, Third Isaiah, speaking for God, calls Israel to a new kind of fast: “Is this not the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them...?”¹⁶⁷

This has been the hope of oppressed people from the beginning of time. Throughout the ages, people of faith have experienced brokenness and loss, and have cried out to a God who seeks a better world for God’s people – a God whose dream for humanity calls us to new ways of living – to new life.

So is it at all surprising that Jesus’ comments in his home town synagogue elicit such a strong reaction? “Borrowing from Isaiah,¹⁶⁸ Jesus situates the character of his mission within the Isaianic hope for the restoration of Israel. Interpreting the words of Isaiah in his sermon, Jesus extends the nature of that hope”¹⁶⁹ to his own day.

¹⁶⁵ Isa. 58:12.

¹⁶⁶ Isa. 61:1-2a.

¹⁶⁷ Isa. 58:1-7c.

¹⁶⁸ Isa. 58:6 and 61:1-2.

¹⁶⁹ Luke 4:18-19n *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible: NRSV The Apocrypha* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003)

The congregation knows the context of the Isaiah passages. They know that Isaiah was talking about Israel’s experience upon their return from exile – their disillusionment that things had not changed for the poor, the outcast, and the needy – had not changed for those who are forever pushed to the margins of society. They know that in those early days of post-exilic Israel the prophet had promised the in-breaking of God to set things right – to turn the tables on those who had everything and so callously dismissed those who did not. “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing,” says Jesus, and in response, “All speak well of him and are amazed at the gracious words that come from his mouth.”¹⁷⁰ No focus groups. No exploratory committee. “Jesus [concludes] his reading and [launches] his mission. It [is] a...stunning announcement of his purpose.”¹⁷¹

Author Joe Nangle calls this passage from Luke “the Lord’s Magna Carta,” because in it Jesus announces that “he is the one sent to bring justice” to God’s people.¹⁷² And we can see these words mirrored and then built upon by Jesus later in Luke’s gospel as Jesus begins what has been called his “Sermon on the Plain:” “Blessed are you who are poor.... Blessed are you who are hungry now.... Blessed are you who weep now....”¹⁷³ This proclamation shared by both Isaiah and Jesus should be our Magna Carta as well – our clarion call – our statement of mission as followers of the One we call Christ.

¹⁷⁰ Luke 4:21-22, paraphrased.

¹⁷¹ <https://sojo.net/preaching-the-word/anointed-spirit?parent=52686>, accessed on December 6, 2018.

¹⁷² <https://sojo.net/preaching-the-word/jesus-returns-nazareth?parent=52686>, accessed on December 6, 2018.

¹⁷³ Luke 6:20-21 *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible: NRSV The Apocrypha*.

Writing in *Sojourners Magazine*¹⁷⁴ Theologian Ched Myers reminds us, “There have always been two Americas: that of rich and poor, of inclusion and exclusion.” The America of exclusion embraces distinctions of age, class, gender, and race among other obvious differences. We might describe it as judging one another based on preconceived characteristics rather than on the character of one’s soul. “The America of inclusion [finds] expression in the ideal of ‘liberty and justice for all,’ and has been embodied...in the embrace of civil rights, women’s suffrage, or child labor laws.” In our faith experience as Episcopalians we would find it embodied in how we live out our Baptismal Covenant.

“These two visions of America,” Myers goes on to say, “compete for our hearts and minds,” and I would add, for our souls. The two visions compete for our attention in the voting booth, in our homes, and even in our churches.¹⁷⁵ I believe with all my heart and soul that Jesus calls us to only one of these two visions or experiences of life: a call to proclaim a gospel that welcomes the stranger, lifts up the lowly, enfolds the lost, and renames the outcast. The vision Jesus proclaims in his hometown synagogue is a vision of the peaceable kingdom of God – where humanity will find a way to live in harmony with the rest of creation; not as harsh rulers who treat the world like a cheap mistress, but as stewards of God’s good gifts, entrusted to act on behalf of the Creator.

We are called to this vision of Jesus. As disciples of a liberating messiah, we are called to break the yoke that binds our sisters and brothers in any form of oppression. We

¹⁷⁴ https://www.jesusradicals.com/uploads/2/6/3/8/26388433/house_for_all_peoples_-_embracing_the_immigrant.pdf, accessed on December 6, 2018.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

are called to loose the bonds of injustice that strangle the helpless and destroy the fabric of creation. Ancient Jewish tradition given voice in the sixteenth century calls this “*tikkun olam*,” usually translated as “repairing the world.”¹⁷⁶ Isaiah calls it “repairing the breach.”

There are people in our communities – people all around us – who know they are called to help repair the world – but they don’t know where to start. Invite them in and welcome them to this holy calling. There are people who are hungry, cold, lonely or afraid. Become part of the ministries at St. Paul’s that seek to make a difference – through groups like the Outreach and Social Justice Committee, Christian formation, or programs like The Brotherhood of St. Andrew, the ECW, and Meals on Wheels – and then invite others into our community, where they can find welcome and a safe place. There are people at St. Paul’s who yearn to grow in their faith, or who struggle with economic hardship, or who want to find a vehicle of service through our parish. Give to the work of St. Paul’s. Share the good gifts you have received from God, so that the love, mercy, justice, and grace of God will be made known in this place, and in the world around us.

We share our gifts, this community, and our ministries with others because we are all, in this place and the community around us, a part of the Body of Christ – each of us – even the folks we might want to label an appendix or a spleen – you know, the folks we secretly think we could all do without, but whom Paul reminds us are just as important a part of the whole body of Christ as anyone else.

¹⁷⁶ <http://www.innerfrontier.org/Practices/TikkunOlam.htm>, accessed on December 6, 2018.

The spirit of the Lord God is upon you – the spirit of the Lord God is upon us, and we are anointed by God through our baptisms and our experiences of the Living Christ to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed. God has proclaimed it is time for us to be about the mission of repairing the world.

In the words of hymn writer and priest, Carl P. Daw, Jr.:

Till all the jails are empty and all the
bellies filled;
Till no one hurts or steals or lies, and no
more blood is spilled;
Till age and race and gender no longer
separate;
Till pulpit, press and politics are free of
greed and hate;
God has work for us to do.¹⁷⁷

God has work for us to do.

¹⁷⁷ Carl P. Daw, Jr. Hope Publishing Company, 1996. Quoted in "Synthesis: A Weekly Resource For Preaching and Worship Following the Revised Common Lectionary," (Boys, MD, PNMSI Publishing Company, January 21, 2007).

Sermon 2: Epiphany 4, Year C (Jeremiah 1:4-10) Dare to Make a Difference

An introductory note to the sermon: This sermon took place the weekend of our Vestry Retreat. My wife, The Rev. Lorraine Ljunggren, served as our supply priest that Sunday and preached the sermon I wrote for this project. The congregation was made aware of this ahead of time. Focusing primarily on the reading from Jeremiah, this sermon addresses the struggle we face when called by God to the practice of *tikkun olam*.

Sermon Text: Most of us are familiar with at least a few of the characters and storylines by A. A. Milne about a young boy named Christopher Robin and his golden-colored honey bear named Winnie the Pooh. Pooh Bear lives in a place called the Hundred Acre Wood along with a number of friends. One such friend is Eeyore, a rather forlorn-looking donkey with melancholy eyes, drooping ears, and a loosely-tacked-on-tail, who goes about life asking questions like, “Why me?” or making pronouncements like, “It’s all for naught,” or “Pathetic. That’s what it is. Pathetic.”¹⁷⁸

Once one gets to know Eeyore it’s rather obvious that he always seems to expect disaster to befall him in one form or another. And whenever one of the other animals ask Eeyore to take on anything new, the donkey, who expects the worst to happen, invariably has some excuse as to why he cannot possibly do what is asked of him, or at best, predicts that surely gloom and doom will befall them if they risk doing a new thing. Eeyore’s fears seem at times to be as big as the Hundred Acre Wood.

Truth be told, each of us has a little bit of Eeyore in us. We resist new things. We do our best to avoid taking risks. We can always come up with a hundred different reasons why we cannot take on a particular task. We hold on as tightly as possible to the

¹⁷⁸ https://www.allgreatquotes.com/eeyore_quotes2.shtml, accessed on December 6, 2018.

past and things as they have always been. We all too often find ourselves reluctant to confront our own fears, and when confronted with the unexpected we ask, “Why me?” I even have a small Eeyore stuffed animal that sits to the side on my computer desk at the church reminding me of the times I chant that age-old mantra, “Why me?”

Well, my friends, this is not a new thing for human beings. We’re in very good company. Throughout history – whenever the call comes to try a new thing, to go to a new place, to speak a prophetic word, most of the time we humans have raised the cry, “Why me?” Perhaps followed by, “Why not send someone else? You know, someone with more training. Someone with more experience. Someone with better skills or more suitable qualifications.”

And perhaps this reaction is most common when the call comes from God. Especially if we sense that God’s call will put us at odds with the world around us.

It’s very much like the call God issues to Jeremiah in today’s reading. When a word from God comes to Jeremiah commissioning him to be a prophet to the nations, Jeremiah’s immediate response is to object. Instead of seeing the possibilities, Jeremiah argues that he is inadequate to the task. In this case he argues that he’s too young. My guess is there are any number of reasons the reluctant prophet could come up with as to why someone else would be better suited to the task at hand.

But, it seems, God knows well the hearts and fears of humankind. In the very next breath God tells Jeremiah there’s no need to be concerned about his age. Jeremiah is assured that God will give the prophet the words to speak at the appropriate time. And then God says what God repeats to every generation, “Do not be afraid...for I am with you to deliver you.” And, as if that assurance isn’t enough, God gives a sign by touching

the mouth of the prophet, thereby giving Jeremiah what he needs to fulfill the call to prophesy. The power given to Jeremiah is awesome indeed: appointed over nations and kingdoms, “to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” I cannot help but consider how challenging and how tempting such a call – such a gift – might be. The hope is the gift and the ability to be a part of God’s dream for this world. The temptation is assuming one has the power to exercise dominion over others – how easy it might become to abuse, or misuse, such a calling!

And though we live half a world away, in a time far removed from Jeremiah, the same awesome power is ours to wield – for good or for ill. For our words, as well as our actions, have power to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. Is it any wonder the most sane among us cry out, “Why me? Why us?” and in our next breath, “God, can’t you send someone else?” Is it any wonder that there are people of faith in every generation who either flee from the call of God as Jeremiah tried to do, or others who see such a calling as an invitation to exert dominion over others?

But, as Presiding Bishop Michael Curry has said many times – quoting his grandmother – “If we’re breathing, God is calling us.”¹⁷⁹ I imagine in much the same way God has called God’s people over the ages. Perhaps like Jeremiah, it’s the call itself that we fear the most. We can compare it to the words of Marianne Williamson, words which are often mistakenly attributed to Nelson Mandela:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are

¹⁷⁹ Many sermons listened to over the 15 years Michael Curry was Bishop of the Diocese of North Carolina.

you “not” to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn’t serve the world. There’s nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. It is not just in some of us; it’s in everyone and as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”¹⁸⁰

My sisters and brothers, God is calling us – calling us to ministries familiar and new – to people and places we know and have yet to meet or see. We may never be called to speak the same sort of word Jeremiah speaks, but God may well ask us to speak the unexpected – to advocate for those whom we never would guess we would support. We may well be the people destined to pull down systems which oppress God’s people, and in their place plant new ways of living and being together in community. We may well be the very ones called to destroy barriers to things like adequate housing, and healthcare; to reasonable, caring, and humane immigration reform; to both food and job security for everyone.

We might do so by wielding a hammer or paint brush building a house with Habitat for Humanity of Johnston County. Or, to address issues of healthcare or immigration reform, we can put to good use our command of language by writing letters or emails to those elected to public offices, entrusted with promoting the common good. We might find ourselves buying extra groceries at the store to put in our food basket the first Sunday of the month, or working to encourage the building of grocery stores in areas

¹⁸⁰ Marianne Williamson, https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Marianne_Williamson, and <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/our-deepest-fear/>, both accessed December 10, 2018.

of our community considered food deserts. If we are an employer or business owner, we can be expansive in our hiring practices. If we're younger and still in school, we can make friends with students we notice are without friends or who sit by themselves at lunch time.

Truth be told, any one of us – all of us have gifts and talents that, with God's help, can be put to work to build up and to plant and maybe even to be prophetic!

It boils down to something Eeyore has been known to say, "A little consideration, a little thought for others, makes all the difference."¹⁸¹

Answering the call of God may well cause us to want to ask, "Why me? Why us?" and to object that we're just not up to the call. But if we're breathing, God is calling us. And if we struggle with that call – or are tempted to abuse that call – well, God says to us, "Do not be afraid...for I am with you to deliver you."¹⁸² And that, my friends, is very good news!

¹⁸¹Thai Nguyen, "Eeyore: A Pessimist's Guide to a Beautiful Life, December 6, 2017 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/eeyore-a-pessimists-guide_b_6204004 Accessed on January 28, 2019.

¹⁸² Jeremiah 1:8 (TJSB).

Sermon 3: Epiphany 5, Year C (Isaiah 6:1-13) by Stephen Jurovics

An introductory note to the sermon: What follows is the basic text for the sermon delivered by Dr. Stephen Jurovics' at my parish, St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Smithfield, NC, on Sunday February 10. Jurovics preached from an outline and later reconstructed parts of his notes into a stand-alone text. Jurovics has used his engineering background to focus on climate change issues for more than two decades and has had about 20 technical papers published over the years concerning this issue.¹⁸³ Jurovics is an active member of Yavneh: A Jewish Renewal Community, where his wife serves as Rabbi. I have reproduce his text as delivered to me.

Sermon Text:

My thanks to Rector Jim Melnyk for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today. I'm delighted and honored to have this chance.

I'm here this morning to speak about climate change as a religious as well as a scientific issue. My book about climate change and religion, *Hospitable Planet: Faith, Action, and Climate Change* , has three main sections: (1) it reviews the environmental teachings in Genesis—Deuteronomy and demonstrates that creation care/climate change is a biblical issue as well as a scientific one; (2) it discusses 10 measures to reduce greenhouse gas significantly; (3) the book advocates and environmental rights movement, similar to the civil rights movement, to push for implementation of those measures.

I wrote this because I believe that the fate of this planet may depend on the actions of the faith community: that's a strong statement, so why? Willful climate change deniers (not skeptics, that's fine) can repeatedly call for more scientific studies and

¹⁸³ Stephan A. Jurovics, *Hospitable Planet: Faith, Action, and Climate Change* (New York, Morehouse Publishing, 2016) back jacket.

question the economic feasibility of mitigation efforts. But I don't think they are going to debate Scripture: I don't think they're going to challenge a teaching of Jesus or a verse in Deuteronomy. Thus, arguments from the faith perspective, coupled with the science, are essentially uncontested. And that's powerful, very powerful, and can bring us to the tipping point of full engagement with this crucial issue.

Now, a bit more of an introduction: I'm an engineer – way, way back a rocket scientist. (Saturn rocket, Apollo moon vehicle) I spent the last 16 years of my corporate career working as a contractor to the EPA on several aspects of climate change. I also have enjoyed biblical study for decades, particularly the teachings about the appropriate relationships between human beings and the natural world, what I call the environmental teachings. The fact that I'm an engineer affects my reading of the Bible: when looking for verses about a particular topic, my perspective is: show me the data. That is, I'm looking for verses which, pulled fwd to our time, clearly apply to that topic. (For example, I won't find anything in the Bible about recycling. But I do find teachings about not being wasteful, and to me they apply to recycling: reduce, reuse, recycle)

Now, how is climate change a biblical issue? Here's my one-to-two minute personal perspective of why climate change is a biblical issue as well as an environmental one:

We know that our atmosphere plays a major role in determining the climate of this planet. In particular, the carbon dioxide (CO₂) plays a very special role, for it reflects back to earth some of the heat that would otherwise vent into space. Since the start of the industrial revolution, around 1750, we have been adding CO₂ to the atmosphere through the burning of fossil fuels. That additional CO₂ reflects more heat back to the earth, and

that total heat is heating up the planet. That heating of the planet, is changing the climate. That's climate change, in a nutshell.

That changing of the climate has multiple effects which we hear about almost daily: the melting of Antarctic ice sheets, the melting of glaciers, sea level rise. Some of those effects are contrary to biblical teachings. Since we bear responsibility for sending the CO₂ into the atmosphere, we bear responsibility for its effects. That's how climate change is a biblical, as well as scientific, issue.

Since it's also a religious issue, people for whom the Bible is important have another reason, in addition to the science, to become involved. And this is important: I believe in the separation of church and state and am not advocating enacting public policies based on biblical teachings. But, if the science is clear, then the religious aspect becomes an additional *motivation* for action.

Most of the environmental teachings we'll discuss occur in Genesis-Deuteronomy, what Jews call the Torah and what Christians call "the law," for that's where we find the creation narratives and instructions about our interactions with the natural world. Let's note one teaching of Jesus and Paul about these five books: in the Sermon on the Mount, as given in Matthew chapter 5, Jesus says:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks* one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Thus, at the end of this passage, I see Jesus identifying *consequences* to following or ignoring these laws. That's very strong.

In addition, Paul called those five books “the Words/oracles of God” in Romans 3:2. The words in Greek used for “Words/oracles of God” is *logion theo*; *logion* is the plural of *logos*, the word used in the opening of John: In the beginning was the Word,... So oracle, to me, conveys the power of Word in the opening of John. [In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.]

These are two compelling characterizations: what Jesus said he came to fulfill – the Words/oracles of God – I think these give great importance to those five books for Christians, as they do for Jews.

We find the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2, and one of the themes that I believe runs through those five books is how to live in harmony—how to live in a godly way—with the natural world God created—with the fish, the birds, the animals, and the land, air, and water in which we find ourselves.

I believe we need to explore each teaching about the natural world, what I call environmental teachings, in a *collective* manner. That is, we often focus on individual verses, which can be fine, but sometimes we need to elevate our perspective and consider what individual teachings about a single topic, spread over five books, are getting at—what is the overarching message from those verses.

For example, consider this verse at the end of the Noah story – Gen. 9:3: “Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses, I give you all these.” Does this verse hold up from Genesis. through Deuteronomy? No. Chapter 11 of Leviticus contains about 20 verses instructing us what can and cannot be eaten. (That’s

why observant Jews do not eat pork or shellfish, for example.) Thus, it's risky and incorrect, in this case, to view Gen. 9:3 as the take-away from the Old Testament (OT) about what can and cannot be eaten. (Thus, a collective approach.)

Let's look at one other particularly important example of the need for a collective view:

Gen. 1:28 has God saying: "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." Some people interpret this verse as God giving humans the right to "have dominion over" or "rule over" all life on earth—in any way that we wish—no limits are expressed here. That's what it seems to say. Note first that the land is not mentioned: it speaks of fish, birds, and every living thing that moves on the earth. It does not say that humans rule over the land. And for good reason: in Exod. 19:5, God says, "All the land is Mine." This is said to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

Moreover, while the verse says humans rule over all life on earth, let's examine one other section of the Noah episode:

Then the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation. Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and its mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and its mate; and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive on the face of all the earth. For in seven days I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have made I will

blot out from the face of the ground." And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him.¹⁸⁴

Note the closing verse. Noah had no discretion about what to place in the ark. If Noah was to “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” as “have dominion over” has been interpreted, God could have told Noah to select land animals and birds to place in the ark. The flood episode could have been written that way, and we would understand that the species that survived the flood did so because of Noah’s decisions. But that is not the narrative: “And Noah did all that the Lord had commanded him.”

I suggest that Genesis 7 fundamentally undermines the prevailing, expansive interpretation of Gen. 1:28. In addition, it highlights the importance of looking at all teachings that address a particular topic, what I call a collective view. That is, from my perspective, we can’t take any one verse as a definitive statement of OT teaching—until we examine the whole OT. In this instance and elsewhere that we shall encounter, God reveals the limits of our latitude, our mastery.

Let’s now examine three environmental teachings in Genesis—Deuteronomy and observe how, in my view, the effects of climate change are contrary to those teachings.

Let’s start again with the Noah episode. Consider these verses from Genesis 6: And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds according to their

¹⁸⁴ Gen. 7:1-5.

kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive.¹⁸⁵

My take-away from this passage is that if God wanted man (Noah) to save every species, then humans also are not to cause the extinction of species.

But with climate change we are causing the loss of species at about 100x the natural rate (E.O. Wilson) This can lead to devastating effects. Thus, with climate change we are acting contrary to this biblical teaching.

Our use of the land:

In Exod. 19:5 God says “All the land is Mine” and in Leviticus, as my wife expressed it, God makes a deal: you may use the land to grow your crops, *but with the condition* that you take care of the needy and the stranger. -- many passages in Leviticus ... (1) when you harvest your crops, do not cut to the very edges of your field—that is for the needy and the stranger; (2) do not cut the corners of your field, that is for the needy and the stranger; (3) when you shake your trees to get the fruit, you may only shake them one time; what is left is for the needy and the stranger.

From my perspective, Jesus synthesized the many passages in Leviticus and elsewhere about our obligations to the needy into two well-known verses in Matthew 25:

What you did for the least of these... What you did not do.... But we are making things tougher for the needy, not helping/taking care of them.

Climate change is bringing about a shortage of food and water which is exacerbated by an increasing world population. Thus, we are steadily reducing our ability

¹⁸⁵ Gen. 6:19-20.

to take care of ourselves as well as “the least of these” – and in this way also, climate change is a religious issue.

Taking the 1st and 2nd examples together, we are reducing biological diversity, and our food supply and water: in short, we are destroying our own life support system.

- Teachings about air pollution: I view greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as a form of air pollution.
- Air pollution existed in biblical times: tanneries, carcasses of dead animals, wind-borne chaff, etc.
- We have **post-biblical** rulings about air pollution that **are rooted in the biblical teachings** “love your neighbor as yourself” and “do unto others as you would have them do to you.” These rulings came about because people downwind complained to the legal/religious authorities—just as we do today. Here’s an example of such a post-biblical ruling:

“Carrion, graves, and tanyards [tanneries] must be kept fifty cubits¹⁸⁶ from a town. A tanyard must only be placed on the east side of a town.¹⁸⁷ [Because the east wind is gentle and will not carry the fumes into the town].” Does this read like land use planning? This is just one ruling, there are many others.

A principle we can pull from these rulings is: an individual is not to engage in an activity that harms the community. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” “Do unto others as you would have them do to you.”

¹⁸⁶ A cubit is about 18 inches, based on the length of a man’s forearm.

¹⁸⁷ *Babylonia Talmud*, Baba Bathra 25a, Soncino Edition, 6021.

These rulings apply equally well, I believe, to GHG emissions that harm not only our neighbors but the entire world community.

- Thus, this last example demonstrates quite explicitly that the release of GHG emissions, which lead to climate change, is contrary to biblical and post-biblical teachings about air pollution, and the preceding ones (loss of species, our obligation to help the needy) are also biblical issues – as well as environmental ones.

These are three of the main points in the first part of the book—demonstrating how some of the effects of climate change are religious issues. The balance of the book discusses what we can do about climate change—**it’s not hopeless**, but we have a very narrow window of time to prevent the inevitability of devastating changes. And we can look at the catastrophes in Houston, Puerto Rico, Louisiana, hurricanes and subsequent flooding from Florence and Michael in 2018, and the fires in California as harbingers of those devastating changes.

Now, the book discusses in some detail 10 measures that would reduce GHG emissions significantly with several examples:

- More renewable energy, especially solar and wind [no elaboration]
- Continue increases in product energy efficiency (Energy Star)
- Reforestation and ending deforestation
- Carbon fee/tax – explain (rebate: six European oil cos; CCL; HR 7173, Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act)
- Close all coal-fired electricity generation plants

- (new one—not in book) do not expand infrastructure for fossil-fuel based energy (e.g., Atlantic Coast pipeline) If we must phase out the use of fossil fuels, does it make sense to spend \$1.5B to expand their infrastructure?

Lastly, the book advocates an environmental rights movement, similar to the civil rights movement, to push for the implementation of these measures.

- Civil rights movement: strategy, two main components: moral/religious argument for moving from segregation to integration; confrontational non-violence. Need both—why? Allow me to read you a brief excerpt from *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, by Reinhold. Niebuhr, one of the great theologians of the 20th century:

“Since reason is always, to some degree, the servant of interest in a social situation, social injustice cannot be resolved by moral and rational suasion alone, as the educator and social scientist usually believe. Conflict is inevitable, and in this conflict power must be challenged by power.”¹⁸⁸ This from a theologian!

That’s why we need to put our beliefs into action—to take to the streets as well as talk—both are necessary. And that’s why I’m grateful for the People’s Climate March in NYC in 2014 and again at the end of April 2017, and the 1000 Ministers March a short while later.

I’ve brought a few copies of a handout with both some of the major points of this talk and some recommended actions. The actions include advocating **publicly** about what we want. Talks in churches are fine, but they alone will not bring about change. We need to be visible to the community.

¹⁸⁸ Reference not cited by the preacher.

It is Americans, We the people, who can bring about change, as the civil rights movement demonstrated. I do not believe that an environmental rights movement would be as turbulent as the civil rights movement, for the vast majority of folks do not care whether their electricity comes from a coal plant or a solar farm as long as the lights go on when we flip the switch.

We are 26 years past the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and yet we continue to be headed towards an environmental catastrophe. For example, if the melting of Greenland as a whole becomes inevitable (it's already melting), it will raise sea levels 23 ft. That won't happen overnight, and scientists are working to determine the rate at which it would happen. But that's one consequence. That 23 ft rise would reduce the size of North Carolina and every coastal state, force the relocation of millions of people, and obliterate billions of dollars of real estate.

The passage of those 26 years means, to me, that the political leadership in this country will not act until the people **demand** action. And people of faith can do that, because we have a double motivation for action: the environmental effects so evident, and our Scripture.

Let us continue to teach and to preach—**from the pulpit**-- and let us also “exert power against power” as Niebuhr wrote and show publicly our determination to put our beliefs into action. We, literally, can change the world.

Sermon 4: Epiphany 6, Year C (Psalm 1; Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 6:17-26)**Redeemed and Re-Dreamed****Sermon Text:**

Did you happen to notice the contrasts set up in today's readings from Scripture? The images we're offered are poles apart from each other: desert shrubs and parched places over and against towering trees planted by the water; chaff that blows away in the wind or branches bearing fruit in abundance; pronouncements of blessings over and against those of woes.

Desert shrubs – shallow rooted and dying of thirst – shrubs that look alive to the naked eye, but below the surface hang on to life by a thread – all their energy taken up by survival – getting to the next day – getting to the next season.

Or trees planted by a stream – with deep running roots, strong branches, many leaves, and much fruit – able to withstand whatever the world brings our way. Trees deeply grounded – firmly planted – present not only for themselves, but for the life of the world around them as well – with energy and grace to spare for all who come within the cooling embrace of their shade.

Why would both Jeremiah and the Psalmist use trees as a metaphor for a firmly grounded life of faith? What is it about trees that speak to our faith? Healthy, thriving trees clean the air around us, taking in CO₂ and producing oxygen. They stabilize the soil around them helping to prevent erosion. Certain trees give fruit to sustain us. Healthy, thriving trees actually act as nature's air conditioners, lowering temperatures around them – with the evaporation from one single mature tree equaling the work of ten room-sized

air conditioners. And “studies show that urban vegetation slows heartbeats, lowers blood pressure, and relaxes brain wave patterns.”¹⁸⁹

Jesus, I am sure, understands the images presented to us from both Jeremiah and this morning’s psalm. Teaching his disciples in the midst of a great crowd, Jesus speaks words of comfort and hope to the world’s lost souls – promising that the kingdom of God belongs to them – that their emptiness will be filled – and that their tears will be turned into laughter. It is not too much of a stretch to envision their lives becoming like trees planted beside deep pools or flowing streams. In the next breath Jesus proclaims woeful challenges to the complacent and hard of heart – those who practice misplaced dominion over their sisters and brothers. Jesus tells us they have had their fill already. They will come to know hunger and sorrow. Dare we say their hearts will be like trees struggling to live beside dried river beds and shifting desert sands?

We are each called to be like trees firmly planted and deeply rooted. Following that analogy, we are called to be people who care for and protect the environment around us – becoming the stewards or the caretakers for creation as God fully intended from the very beginning of the world. We are each called to put down roots that stabilize the community around us as trees stabilize the soil. We become the blessing for those who are poor, who are hungry, and who mourn. We are to be those who breathe life into the world around us – being deeply rooted in our faith, which gives us the strength to love and serve the world.

¹⁸⁹ Canopy, “The Benefits of Trees,” <http://canopy.org/tree-info/benefits-of-trees/>. Accessed on February 13, 2019.

But too often we find ourselves spread just a bit too thin – stretching for just a little bit more water. Perhaps we find ourselves wondering where the energy will come from to do the job, to keep the house and yard, to take care of the homework, and to care for the kids. How do we balance our schedules, perhaps get a chance to play a little, and still find time to minister to the world beyond our hectic lives? Where do we find the ability to bless those who are oppressed and broken-hearted and bring back to earth those who simply don't care?

Without being deeply grounded in prayer, in the study of the word, and our weekly meal at the Holy Table we run the risk of drying up – dying of thirst and withering away. Without being deeply grounded we run the risk of running ourselves ragged.

We listen to the Good News of Jesus Christ and we look at our lives and the world around us, and it's plain to see the life of this world is out of sync. There are too many who are hungry and poor – too many who are sorrowful, too many who are excluded or reviled. There are just too many thirsty shrubs – and not enough trees. Rather than being strengthened and nourished, those on the margins are pushed further away. The resources to bring life-giving water to the desert places are there – the will to do something, and the distribution systems needed to get the work done, are just out of whack.

We know things need to change – that life should be different – that life is supposed to be abundant and grace-filled. But we struggle over how to make that change come about. The temptation – the danger – is to run ourselves ragged, putting bandage

after bandage on wounds that are cut to the very marrow – wounds that bleed from the center of the world’s being. Because the wounds are so deep, and our lives so complicated, we’ve learned to treat symptoms rather than root causes.

What Jesus says in our gospel lesson today – Luke’s listing of blessings and woes – is no different than what Mary proclaimed to Elizabeth, or what we heard Jesus proclaim in the synagogue at Nazareth a few Sundays back. It’s no different than the judgment and hope Jeremiah proclaimed to Judah, or the promise Isaiah proclaimed to the captives in Babylon who were about to be led home from exile. God cares deeply for all of God’s creation – and God calls each of us to care just as well. And while God does want us to make a difference in the world – plugging a leak here and a leak there as we can – God actually wants us to make the world a different place – a whole new creation!

In Jesus, God is **redeeming** and **re-dreaming** creation. In and through Christ God is turning the world upside down – or rather, turning the world upside right. And we’re called to be a part of it all – firmly planted – growing strong – deeply rooted – a source of strength and nourishment for the world.

I’m reminded of Absalom Jones – whose feast day was celebrated by the Church this past week. In 1787 the white leadership of integrated St. George’s Methodist Church in Philadelphia decided it best for the Black membership to be relegated to the upstairs gallery – you know, neighbors had been talking and all that! On a Sunday morning in November Jones and the other Black members of the church were directed upstairs – apart from the rest of the congregation. The Black members of St. George’s walked out that day – claiming their dignity and self-worth.

After much soul-searching they formed St. Thomas African Episcopal Church – putting down roots in a new place – nearer the Living Water that would nourish not only the whole of their createdness in God, but also nourish the world around them even today. Fifteen years later, in 1802, Absalom Jones would become the first black priest in the Episcopal Church – though it would take over one and a half centuries beyond that event for our country to finally pass laws against such blatant discrimination and moral oppression. Yet today there are some who still seek ways to legalize forms of discrimination and oppression toward human beings who find themselves in still other minorities.

Healing our world – repairing the breach that separates us from one another and from God – can take a long time. But as 19th century clergyman and abolitionist Theodore Parker first wrote, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”¹⁹⁰ *Tikkun olam* is a faithful calling for God’s people to follow. The kingdom of God is the hope of God unfolding all around us.

God continues to **redeem** and **re-dream** creation. Calling us to be firmly rooted in the love and grace of God. Calling us to be firmly rooted in the stories of our faith. Calling us to be firmly rooted in God’s call to justice, peace and love. Being firmly planted, growing strong, offering shade, shelter and nourishment, as we join with God in making the world a different place – calling us all to be a part of God’s dream.

¹⁹⁰ “All Things Considered”, NPR, September 2, 2010
<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129609461>. Accessed on February 13, 2019.

Sermon 5: Epiphany 7, Year C (Genesis 45:3-11, 15; Luke 6:7-38) The Family

Business

Sermon Text:

“Who is closer to God,” the seeker asked, “the saint or the sinner?” “Why the sinner, of course,” the elder said. “But how can that be?” the seeker asked. “Because,” the elder said, “every time a person sins they break the cord that binds them to God. But every time God forgives them, the cord is knotted again. And so, thanks to the mercy of God, the cord gets shorter and the sinner closer to God.”¹⁹¹

Joan Chittister, who gives us this story of God’s mercy, tells us that “This Society is locked in mortal combat between mercy and justice. On which side must we err,” she asks, “if err we must? Which side do we want for ourselves when we cut corners, bend the rules, break the codes, [and] succumb to needs not being met in other places and ways?”¹⁹² Most of us, I suspect, would like to be treated mercifully – especially when we mess up – especially when we deserve judgment – especially, I’m thinking, when the response of justice would be to call us down on the carpet. Offering mercy to someone else – offering mercy to someone who has wronged us – well, that’s a tougher sell for most people.

Jesus certainly points us time and again to the bond that unites us to God – and how when we’ve broken that bond God’s forgiveness knots that bond back together. But Jesus also speaks to us about the bond we share with one another as children of God. Jesus knows so well that we often find those bonds that tie us together torn asunder. He

¹⁹¹ Joan Chittister. *40 Stories to Stir the Soul*. (Erie, PA, Benetivision, 2010) 52.

¹⁹² Ibid.

speaks to us about ways of seeking one another's forgiveness and finding ways of retying those broken bonds.

Jesus tells us, "...love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you.... Do to others as you would have them do to you.... Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful...."¹⁹³

Episcopal priest and spiritual director Martin Smith sees our gospel lesson's call to be merciful and forgiving as a way of following in the footsteps of Jesus – carrying out a ministry of reconciliation. He writes, "In today's gospel passage we are urged to be children of God by working, so to speak, in the family business." Smith explains, "In the society in which Jesus lived, most production was domestic, in family businesses where even little children were hard at work. It is still this way with many societies today.... And so it would have been for Jesus, the little apprentice, alongside his sisters and brothers in Joseph's construction business."¹⁹⁴

But then we come to the relationship Jesus shares with God, whom Luke tells us is the heavenly father of Jesus. Smith builds upon his family business metaphor: "The Holy One's family business is reconciliation, risky solidarity, and love that is unconditional and generous—a business that is indifferent to profit or even breaking even. What a strange business model! But it is God's—and if we are to be part of the

¹⁹³ Luke 6:27-28a, 31, 35-36.

¹⁹⁴ Martin Smith, (*Sojourners Online, Preaching the Word*, 2/24/2019) <https://sojo.net/preaching-the-word/family-business?parent=227317>. Accessed on January 6, 2019.

company... ‘God and Family: Distributors of Unconditional Love,’ then we must get down to business, and demonstrate our resemblance to the Creator.”¹⁹⁵

We’re challenged to ask ourselves, “What exactly does my family business look like?” Over the past five weeks we’ve been taking a look at what it would mean for our world to turn away from the false god of the Dominion Mandate in order to embrace a model of *tikkun olam* – what is for me, another way of describing the subversive nature of the kingdom of heaven – where any dominion practiced is done so in the grace and mercy of God. Domination and *tikkun olam* are two world views that do not mix.

The Dominion Mandate, at its worst interpretation from the early verses of Genesis, demands its own form of justice on behalf of humankind; with mercy reserved only for those at the top of the creation food chain. And all too often the Dominion Mandate expounds a male-dominated theology, and a male-dominated cry for justice, believing the needs and desires of certain groups to be vastly more important than either other people or the environment around us. Proponents see themselves as the pinnacle of God’s creation, and therefore the created world and any lesser beings must bow to their needs – to their desires – to their hopes and dreams.

We see the brokenness of the Dominion Mandate whenever we choose a healthy bottom-line over care for our planet – whenever we let suspicion and fear overrule our love for our neighbor – whenever we turn away the sojourner among us in an attempt to insulate us from those whom we believe are different from us – whenever we find ourselves denying others the very mercy we long for ourselves when our lives take a hard turn.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

Both Chittister and Jesus, however, speak to us about a different sort of mandate – a divine mandate. Franciscan priest Joe Nangle sees that mandate acted out in our faith stories more than one thousand years before the birth of Christ: “God's Word today confronts us with [a] mysterious, demanding, and, yes, elusive divine mandate,” writes Nangle. It is the “divine mandate” of forgiveness. Nangle points us toward Joseph, whom we read about this morning. Joseph, the one of “multicolored coat” fame. Joseph, who “receives with open arms the very brothers who had plotted his death and sold him into slavery.”¹⁹⁶

Joseph has every right to demand justice from his brothers who had betrayed him – and because of that they stand before Joseph in Egypt fearful of their lives. They expect justice, as only betrayers might understand, and instead Joseph bursts into tears at the sight of them. He is different from his brothers. “Joseph no sooner reminds his brothers of their great sin (v. 4) than he renounces retribution.... The last word [for Joseph and for us] is a word of life, not death.”¹⁹⁷ Later in the story Joseph will say to his brothers, “Have no fear! Am I a substitute for God? Besides, although you intended me harm, God intended it for good, so as to bring about...the survival of many people.”¹⁹⁸ In other words, Joseph is merciful as God is merciful – something a Torah Observant Jesus will call us to centuries later.

¹⁹⁶ Joe Nangle, “An Elusive Mandate,” <https://sojo.net/preaching-the-word/elusive-mandate?parent=227317>. Accessed January 9, 2019.

¹⁹⁷ Gen. 45:4-8 commentary note.

¹⁹⁸ Gen. 50:19-20.

Had the phrase been around in the time of Joseph and his brothers we might have said Joseph's response to his brothers was an act of *tikkun olam* – an act of repairing their broken and frightful world. Not only are the brothers forgiven for their treatment of Joseph, but the whole of Israel – a small family clan at this point – the whole of Israel is saved from starvation. This is *tikkun olam* – this is repairing the breach – repairing the world – and it is God's dream for not only each of us, but for the whole of creation.

Isn't that what Jesus is saying to us in today's reading from Luke? When faced with the actions of others, do we end up believing ourselves to be substitutes for God, bringing some kind of divine retribution, or do we find ourselves imitating the divine compassion of God – embracing what Nangle calls a divine mandate of forgiveness? Isn't that precisely what Jesus is talking about when he teaches, "Do to others as you would have them do to you," and in conjunction with that wisdom, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."?¹⁹⁹

The elder in our opening story tells the seeker, "Every time a person sins they break the cord that binds them to God. But every time God forgives them, the cord is knotted again. And so, thanks to the mercy of God, the cord gets shorter and the sinner closer to God."²⁰⁰ If we, when we feel broken and lost, can seek out God and have the cord that binds us together knotted again, could we really ask anything less for others? For that reason – recalling the hope of God that the whole of creation find peace –

¹⁹⁹ Lk. 6:31, 36.

²⁰⁰ Chittister.

perhaps we can now imagine ourselves tying knots – strengthening the bonds we share with one another as children of God.

Chapter Five: Theological and Homiletical Analysis and Reflection on the Sermon Series

In her book, *Creation-Crisis Preaching: Ecology, Theology, and the Pulpit*, Leah D. Schade seeks to answer the questions, “How can we proclaim justice for God’s Creation in the face of climate disruption? How do we share the good news of resurrection even as humans are crucifying Creation?”²⁰¹ In part, that has been the exercise of this paper and the accompanying sermons. One reality pointed out by Schade in her book, and highlighted earlier in this paper, is that the issues of climate change and abuse of Creation also include an aspect of social justice. Schade reminds us that as pointed out in Matthew 25, we are called by God to care for the least of our sisters and brothers among us. Realizing ahead of time that Stephen Jurovics would be emphasizing climate change and creation care, my sermons focused primarily on challenging practices of domination between human beings and embracing the healing work of *tikkun olam* on that relational level.

This chapter will include analysis and reflection on each of the five sermons offered at St. Paul’s during the season of Epiphany 2019 (Epiphany 3C – 7C) as well as concluding comments. Along with my own observations I also use unsolicited oral history from the established practices of St. Paul’s Monday Night Bible Study Group and the weekly Lectionary-based Bible Study. Both groups primarily discuss the upcoming Sunday’s lessons while taking into account previous weeks’ studies.

Sermon 1, Epiphany 3C

²⁰¹ Schade, Back Jacket.

This sermon was offered on January 27, 2019, a week before St. Paul's Vestry went on annual retreat. The goal going into the retreat was preparation for the Rector's sabbatical beginning in May 2019. Having been exposed to the topic through an article in our monthly newsletter and the first sermon in the series our Vestry quickly gravitated toward the theme, "Practicing *Tikkun Olam*" for both the retreat and as a topic for the parish to explore during Lent and the upcoming sabbatical period. I believe their embracing of the theme was directly related to the energy experienced after the first sermon in my series.

The St. Paul's Lenten program will feature a local Rabbi speaking on the roots of *tikkun olam* as well as speakers from area social justice providers dealing with senior care, children's after school programs, housing, and homelessness. Conversations are now taking place regarding the need to bring in North Carolina Interfaith Power & Light for an energy audit and to speak with the congregation about how we can better care for the world around us. Our Vestry is also exploring using a Spiritual Gifts Survey during the sabbatical time to help members identify how to better minister in the congregation and the surrounding community. Comments during the working portion of the retreat touched on Vestry response to both this sermon and the second sermon as an incentive for setting both the Lenten Program and Sunday Forums during sabbatical.

It was my sense that the phrase "The Lord's Magna Carta" describing Jesus' words in Nazareth struck a chord with the Vestry and with the congregation as a whole. There also seems to be a renewed energy not only to reach out into the community, but to work at being aware of the times we unconsciously practice exclusion in our lives, both ideas having been a part of the sermon. There seems to be a lot of energy around the

concept of *tikkun olam* and how it might be practiced in our congregation, healing breaches on a local level.

It is interesting to note a connection congregants made between *tikkun olam* and the gulf created by exile in its various forms. Conversations taking place during our regularly scheduled lectionary Bible study groups included issues surrounding Israel's exile and how exile might be understood today, including current topics such as refugee resettlement, asylum seekers, immigrants, and attitudes toward Muslims. Past sermons and conversations have noted how images from nature have been a part of the conversation around exile and return. Isaiah promises a "Holy Way" in the wilderness that will become the pathway home from exile. He proclaims, "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly...."²⁰² The Isaiah passage continues with a promise that not even fools will be able to miss this highway, and one possible translation promises that not even the unclean will pass it by.²⁰³ In a later sermon we will see images from Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17 that both use images of dried out shrubs and chaff as images of brokenness and exile while using images of flourishing trees as images of a faithful relationship with God. One group identified those on our prayer list who cannot get to church due to health issues, or those challenged by less than friendly handicap accessibility in our worship space as experiencing their own form of exile.

²⁰² Isa. 35:1-2a.

²⁰³ Isa. 35:8.

If I were to give this sermon again I would make two specific changes. First, the sermon would have benefitted from having *tikkun olam* introduced earlier. Specifically a definition of the practice would fit right after the quote from Isaiah 58:12 where the prophet tells those in exile that they will be called repairers of the breach. This would have introduced the topic sooner, and would have allowed the comments from Isaiah 61 to serve as examples of *tikkun olam*. Second, I would reconsider how I introduced the imagery of the body of Christ from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Upon further reflection I think the transition bringing in his comments on the body of Christ was too abrupt. My hope was to use the imagery to support the call to reach out to others in the community and to welcome in the stranger, saying that we cannot declare one part of the body less important than another. I think the imagery is worth using.

Sermon 2, Epiphany 4C

This Sunday fell during St. Paul's Annual Vestry Retreat. While I wrote the sermon, it was delivered by my wife, The Rev. Lorraine Ljunggren. After two and a half decades of listening to each other's sermons as part of our writing process, and having served together for ten years, it was not difficult for her to find my voice in the text. I shared the sermon with the Vestry while on retreat. I wanted both the Vestry and the congregation to find some hope in the knowledge that even mighty prophets such as Jeremiah were reluctant to step in and take action in response to God's call.

At the Vestry Retreat I could sense the energy in the chapel as I spoke about Jeremiah's reluctance to respond to God's call. We spoke about God's ability to see the promise within us even when we cannot, and God's promise to be with us when we

respond to God's call in our lives. I was encouraged during our process of finalizing the agenda for the Wednesday Night Lenten Program when the Vestry included several of the struggles mentioned in the sermon as part of their deliberations, and voiced a desire to better understand servanthood over domination. This led me to believe that the words had struck home.

The one concern I had going into the service was how people would respond to the Eeyore illustration. I didn't want them so caught up in their memories of reading Milne that they missed the message – like a sentimental or funny TV commercial that loses track of the product. That may have happened for some, but my read of the both the Vestry and the congregation upon return from retreat leads me to believe people were able to connect Eeyore to both Jeremiah and to themselves.

I felt good about the way the sermon circled back to Eeyore just before the conclusion reminding everyone that “[a] little consideration, a little thought for others, makes all the difference.”²⁰⁴ Regarding that quote, the Monday Night Bible Study talked about how “repairers of the breach” resonated more than “repairers of the world” simply because it felt more obtainable. Apparently it is true that even small steps can make a big difference in people's lives. My hope is that this sermon, along with the program we develop for Lent, will impact the way we treat one another and remind us of the need to be considerate of others and mindful of the challenges others may be experiencing in their lives.

²⁰⁴Thai Nguyen, “Eeyore: A Pessimist's Guide to a Beautiful Life, December 6, 2017 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/eeyore-a-pessimists-guide_b_6204004 Accessed on January 28, 2019.

Already our conversations at the Vestry level and the church Bible study groups have turned to issues such as food deserts and homelessness in our county. This indicates a growing concern toward the plight of others, listening for God’s call in our own lives, and letting go of a “why me?” mindset. Our Vestry’s desire to re-explore our spiritual gifts as individuals and as a congregation during sabbatical time tells me they took something positive away from the sermon.

Sermon 3, Epiphany 5C

This is the Sunday we welcomed Stephen Jurovics as our guest preacher. Jurovics is the author of *Hospitable Planet: Faith, Action, and Climate Change*. He was invited to St. Paul’s to lead an intergenerational forum on a faith-based response to the issues of climate change. As an active member of the Yavneh Jewish Renewal Community in Raleigh and the spouse of Yavneh’s Rabbi, Jurovics began his sermon by referencing the existence of environmental teachings in Torah. He then underscored the importance of those teachings for Christians by tying Torah precepts about care for the land²⁰⁵, creatures²⁰⁶, our neighbor, and the stranger²⁰⁷ to gospel accounts in Matthew. Jurovics tied Jesus’ declaration in Matthew 5 that he had not come to abolish the law,²⁰⁸ to the many commands in Torah; explaining that the Jesus of the gospels demand that as Christians we take Torah seriously. He also tied Jesus’ parable of the sheep and the

²⁰⁵ Ex. 19:5.

²⁰⁶ Gen. 7:1-5.

²⁰⁷ Lev. 19:18, 33-34

²⁰⁸ Mt. 5:17-19.

goats²⁰⁹ to the teachings of Torah commanding us to care for both our neighbor as well as for the stranger.

Jurovics' sermon demonstrated how human induced climate change goes against God's command to love our neighbor and to do unto to others as we would have them do unto us; how destroying the climate harms humanity, thus harming our neighbor. I believe his comparison between hardened hearts in stories from Torah to what he called the hardened hearts of those who deny climate change was powerful. Though there were some shocked looks in the congregation when he said climate change deniers know that they are wrong, but out of greed they choose to benefit from the status quo.

Jurovics was much more explicit than I have been in his critique of the current culture and the need to take some very specific actions. Part of that comes from the freedom of an outside voice being able to come in and challenge listeners in a way I could not.

Both weekly Bible Study groups expressed surprise that they had never considered that the land belongs to God and that our destruction of the land is a violation of God's desires for creation. I also sensed a strong, positive reaction when Jurovics tied our abuse of creation with problems in food production and with our lack of love for our neighbor. His sermon has helped strengthen St. Paul's desire to go green wherever we can, including trying to eliminate the use of paper products in our kitchen to completing our turnover to all LED lighting on campus.

²⁰⁹ Mt. 25:31-46.

Sermon 4, Epiphany 6C

It is my sense that this sermon worked on several levels, although it could benefit from additional work.

One area that seemed to work well was tying the images found in Jeremiah and Psalm 1 of being like firmly rooted trees planted by water and desert shrubs or chaff to the images of blessings and woes in Luke's gospel. I believe this comparison helped communicate God's desire for us to live lives of faith that are both strong and sensitive to the needs of others. It becomes an easy shift for the listeners to imagine where the source of the strength found for those whom Jesus calls blessed, and to imagine the woes as a dried river bed or the barren shifting sands of the desert.

Several members of the Monday Night Bible Study agreed that it is a challenge to be a source of blessing in a broken world. They resonated with the weekly call to the Holy Table as one way to avoid the risk of drying up or running ourselves ragged. The imagery of firmly planted trees also worked here with the call to care for and protect the environment around us as God originally intended, putting down roots to stabilize our communities, and becoming a blessing to those who are poor, who are hungry, and who mourn. Here the earlier comments in the sermon about the role trees play in creation supported an image that we breathe life into the world around us.

And while this sermon was not specifically a call to environmental stewardship on the part of St. Paul's, the importance of healthy trees to a healthy environment rooted in the sermon.

I believe the contrast between a world out of sync and the practice of *tikkun olam* worked as well. The blatant racism practiced at St. George's Methodist Church where Absalom Jones attended in 1787 and the black community's willingness to leave and set down new roots that would help change the Church worked as a clear example of *tikkun olam* at work.

There are also several places in the sermon that could benefit from additional reflection. Despite the movement from St. George's Methodist Church in 1787 through the Civil Rights movement last century and our attempts to eradicate racism in our time, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s observation made in the mid-1960s still stands: Sunday morning is still the most segregated hour of the week, and racism is still a hard topic to discuss in the South. And although the arc of the moral universe may bend toward justice, for too many people that arc is too long. The sermon could have been stronger by including such observations.

The image of God redeeming and redreaming creation worked well and several people in the Monday Night Bible Study found the phrase and the image memorable. While the sermon might have benefited from more detail on what is meant by speaking about God's dream for humanity, as well as the whole of creation, our congregation has become quite familiar with the term. St. Paul's, along with the rest of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, benefited greatly from the presence of Presiding Bishop Michael Bruce Curry, who was our bishop for fifteen years. Many times we have heard Bishop Curry preach about the "nightmare of this world" versus the "dream of God." To that end, I am convinced that when the people of St. Paul's hear the phrase "dream of God" they are aware of what it means to follow Jesus as opposed to worship Jesus, to

love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbor and the stranger as we love ourselves.

Sermon 5, Epiphany 7C

This sermon begins with an illustration from Joan Chittister as a way of offering a feminine voice to the call to practice *tikkun olam*. Looking back at the text the Monday Night Bible Study group wondered, along with the seeker in the story, about how the sinner might be closer to God than the saint. But they answered their own questions by surmising that since even the saints are sinners the illustration about the knotted cord shortening the distance between the sinner and God applies to us all.

The knotted cord becomes a metaphor for God's desire to repair the divisions of the world and invites the listener to consider the competing claims of the world against God's understanding of justice and mercy. The sermon compares a view of justice couched within the Dominion Mandate to what Martin Smith calls our family business as followers of Jesus. Justice is meant to be fair, decent, and right, but the Dominion Mandate holds that it applies only to human beings in the first place, and in the end, only to a select group of human beings at that. God's justice is always tempered with mercy and reconciliation, and as members of the household of God, we are all called to participate in that family business.

There is a meaningful turn in the sermon when the move is made from tying the broken cords between human beings and God to tying the broken cords that exist between human beings or between us and our planet. While Jesus certainly taught about our relationships with God, he more often spoke about our relationships with one another.

Embracing the Dominion Mandate is one way of breaking the bonds between us all; whether we are talking about the health of our planet, the health of our relationships with one another, or the health of our relationships with God.

The concluding chapters of the Joseph saga, including this Sunday's passage and corresponding remarks by Joseph in Genesis 50, serve as illustrations of both justice tempered by mercy and the practice of *tikkun olam*. Members of the Monday Night group commented that Joseph had every right to demand justice from his brothers and punish them, but he renounces any right to retribution.

In the end this sermon compares the practice of *tikkun olam* to the teachings of Jesus in Luke 6 as well as his summary of the Law, naming them all a part of the family business we share as members of the household of God.

Summary Remarks on the Sermons

Context is important whenever or wherever we preach. Preaching in a congregation that is somewhat homogenous in their theology is different than preaching in a significantly theologically diverse congregation. Someone like Bill McKibben preaching at The Riverside Church in New York might approach the text differently in a small, conservative congregation. Coming in as a guest preacher offers a different latitude. Over my eight-plus years at St. Paul's I've come to understand when I need to be more outspoken and when being subtle carries more weight. For instance, when our residents of many Johnston County communities awoke to find KKK flyers littering their mailboxes it was necessary to speak a direct word. When yet another mass shooting took place in 2018, this time at a school in Parkland, Florida, it was important to speak out

against a sense that as a nation we are sacrificing our children to the gods of the Second Amendment. My particular style of preaching in my current context anchor the text in practice of our Baptismal Covenant and the Great Commandment.

One advantage of doing a seasonal sermon series is that the preacher can always move from subtly to more direct illustrations as the series progresses. A second advantage is that seasonal preaching can introduce concepts, such as *tikkun olam*, for use in seasons that follow. For example, at St. Paul's in 2019 in keeping with the concept of practicing *tikkun olam* – repairing the world – our Lenten programs will provide opportunities to understand better the needs in our community and how we might participate in meeting those needs.

Closing Observations

In the first chapter we explored a working definition of the Dominion Mandate, along with some of its social and political expressions, as proclaimed since the late twentieth century. The Dominion Mandate holds that human beings are the top of God's created order and as such, all of creation is designed to serve humanity's needs and pleasures. How we treat the environment is addressed only as how the environment can best serve humanity.

The Mandate also holds that certain groups of humanity – those who hold what are considered the proper beliefs – have been given dominion over other human beings. We see that belief in action in social ills such as racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, gender bias, and patriarchy. Modern day theological movements such as the Prosperity Gospel and Millennialism also carry out intrinsic forms of abuse, especial toward the poor in the former and toward the environment in the latter.

The second chapter addressed the exegetical issues surrounding our understanding of the creation stories, especially as they are addressed in Genesis 1:26-28 and Genesis 2:4bff. We explored how the words dominion (*rada*) and subdue (*kavash*) have been traditionally defined, as well as reasonable reinterpretations. This chapter challenges the reader to reread Genesis 1:26-28 in light of the Genesis 2 narrative, placing the literal language of the former under suspicion in light of the wider canon of scripture. Chapter Two also seeks to expand our understanding of Martin Buber's I-Thou dialogue to include what Paul Santmire calls an "I-Ens" proponent, with the "Ens" participant in the dialogue with God being the non-human part of creation. Chapter Two closes with a shift to embracing a hermeneutic of *tikkun olam* as an alternative to dominion language.

Chapter Three offers a working definition of *tikkun olam* and invites us to turn our backs on the Dominion Mandate and preach the practice of repairing the world. This practice embraces the whole of creation as God's beloved, and ties together Torah commands to care for creation and for one another to the teachings of Jesus as proclaimed in the gospels. This chapter identifies Jesus as a Torah observant Jew and shows how his teachings connect both to Torah and the practice of *tikkun olam* as it has evolved to this day.

In Chapter Four is a five-part sermon series offered beginning on the Third Sunday after the Epiphany in 2019. These sermons were offered at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Smithfield, NC and are meant to offer a distinction between embracing the Dominion Mandate or the practice of *tikkun olam*. Four of the five sermons focus on how we can better practice *tikkun olam* within our human relationships, while touching in places on our care for the environment. The third sermon, offered by climate author Stephen Jurovics, focuses primarily on climate change and how that problem affects humanity.

Finally, Chapter Five offers reflections on the five sermons and the positive aspects of a sermon series on the topic of *tikkun olam*. Taken together, my research on the problems of the dominion mandate and my practice of preaching on *tikkun olam* might highlight eight theses, in no particular order, for how a preacher might best address climate change:

1. Climate change and human relationships cannot be understood and addressed separately from one another. How we act toward the whole of creation must be understood within the theological constraints of what it

means for all of humanity to be created in the image and likeness of God, and how our treatment of the world around us affects the lives of others.

Human beings are part of a complex ecosystem. When we harm the environment we harm ourselves.

2. Climate change cannot be understood and addressed without recognizing how disproportionately the poor are affected by its consequences. Natural catastrophes such as extreme temperature variations, fires, and floods have serious impacts on all, but those who cannot easily relocate or afford insurance bear a greater burden. Food shortages and higher fuel prices take a serious toll. Throughout Scripture we are commanded particularly to care for the poor and the disenfranchised.
3. Offer something constructive. Remind listeners that they can contact their elected representatives. Highlight ways in which the congregation is already practicing *tikkun olam*, whether it's an emphasis on steps the congregation is taking to go green or ways in which the congregation continues to be active in other areas of social justice.
4. Keep in mind the Old Testament witness to the depth of God's love for the whole of creation and for the importance of caring for what God has created. Pay attention to the connections that exist between the Hebrew and Christian Testaments. Rabbi David Zaslow and Joseph A. Lieberman offer examples of that connection building on Paul's image of the Gospel message as wild olive branches grafted onto the root of Judaism.²¹⁰ In

²¹⁰ David Zaslow and Joseph A. Lieberman, *Jesus: First-Century Rabbi* (Brewster, MA Paraclete Press, 2014) 13. The authors refer to Rom. 11:17-18.

chapter two of their book, *Jesus: First-Century Rabbi*, the authors list nearly four dozen instances where a passage or passages from the Jewish tradition, either Hebrew Scripture, Talmud, or Midrash (Root), find a correlation in the Christian Scriptures (Branch).²¹¹ The work of people like Zaslow and Lieberman can serve as a starting point for finding connections in both traditions that specifically address the environment.

5. Think globally and act locally. I have been told by parishioners that repairing the breach sounds much more manageable than repairing the world. *Tikkun olam* includes both. The preacher might ask, “Where are the breaches in my own life? What needs repairing in my faith community, my local community, and then beyond?”
6. Use story. Jesus probably had a myriad of reasons for using story when he preached. In terms of addressing some of the tension around climate change, story can allow the preacher to challenge the consequences of climate change in ways that even deniers might be able to hear. Appendix A contains a modern day parable I wrote as a way of speaking during a NC Public Utilities Commission concerning the approval of two new coal-fired energy plants in the state.
7. Pay attention to the Church seasons and their themes. The RCL Propers for Year C in Epiphany worked well for this theme.
8. Be aware of your preaching context. Speak in a way that invites the congregation to listen and engage. Climate change is a volatile topic which

²¹¹ Ibid, 18-27.

has become wrapped up in political debate and, at times, vitriolic debate. As an Episcopal priest I attempt to undergird all my preaching with both the Great Commandment and our Baptismal Covenant. I ask my congregation to seek always to keep those aspects of our faith in mind when wrestling with difficult political and theological constructs.

Appendix A

As a priest speaking to the Public Utilities Commission I must make it clear that I am speaking from a theological point of view. This means I am speaking about relationships; that is, about our relationships with one another as part of the human race as well as our relationship with the Creator and creation. I am, by baptism and vocation, the follower of a storyteller, and so I offer you this morning A Modern Day Parable:

In the early days of the 21st century, the people of a great nation cried out for cheap, abundant energy to light their nights, warm their homes in the winter and cool their sweaty brows in the summer. They sought power to charge their iPods, their phones, their Blackberries and Palm Pilots, and to run their laptops and plasma TVs. They sought the blessed, seven-seated SUV to carry their 1.5 children and occasionally their soccer teams. They built McMansions for two, and left their lights on at night to drive away the darkness. They warmed or cooled their homes while they were away so they would be comfortable upon their return....

Great companies arose to meet the desires of the people – to supply cheap and abundant energy. They found ways to meet the demand that not only supplied the people's insatiable hunger, but which also created great profits for the companies and those who stood at their helm. They knew they could build huge, pulverized coal burning plants that polluted the environment; and they could build them even if they weren't needed, because people feared any lack of comfort. They even sought, and were granted, exemptions from pollution standards; the people's hunger was so great.

The people and the companies that served them were given over to their desires and their greed. Mountains were leveled and streams diverted or buried. Fish sickened and died. The skies darkened with poisonous greenhouse gases and toxic mercury particles, the snows fled their ancient homes, the ice packs to the north and south retreated in fear. Children who once breathed the free air became hostages to asthma, allergies, cancer, heart disease, brain damage and death. The elderly feared to leave their heated or air conditioned homes because there were code red days and ozone alerts that meant simply breathing outside brought for them the risk of death.

The day came when the children of the earth feared the outdoors even more than they feared not having enough power to run all their gadgets and toys. They feared the sun that brought with it deadly cancer. They feared the breeze that brought with it asthma and emphysema. They told the great companies, “Enough! Enough of the great coal burning plants that destroy the air. Enough of the mining that destroys the mountains, ruins the streams, and pollutes our waters. We will let go of our greed – and make wise decisions on efficient ways of living. We will demand that products we buy make more efficient use of power. We will support searches for alternative fuels and cleaner ways of producing energy – harnessing the sun, the wind and rushing waters.”

And the great companies finally listened to the wisdom of the people. They saw how the destruction of mountains and the pollution of rivers harmed the earth and her people. They saw how adding more coal-fired plants caused deadly health issues to the very people they sought to serve. And they, as fellow human beings on this fragile earth, our island home, used their money in an attempt to heal the world. But they had waited

too long. And the people's stewardship of the earth came to an end. Because even God could not keep alive a world that wanted to die.

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