

Creation Care Sunday
“The Power of God”
Genesis 2:4-9, 15; Mark 5:21-39
Rev. Joy Laughridge
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For this year’s Creation Care Sunday, I found inspiration from a resource provided by Creation Justice Ministries. CJM is an ecumenical ministry that has been around for 40 years, and their mission is to “educate, equip, and mobilize Christian individuals, congregations, denominations, and communions to protect, restore, and rightly share God’s creation.” We have designated today as a day to think about creation care, but to truly be faithful stewards of the environment, it takes ongoing engagement, and CJM is a great resource that’s available to us, so I encourage you to look at their website.

That’s one thing we can do *after* today, but today, here in our worship, we are listening for God’s word, and as we do that now, I want to begin by asking a question for us to consider. The question is this. *Is the power of God informing how we approach our relationship with the earth and its resources?* Well, I don’t know, you might say. What do you mean, is the power of God informing my relationship with the earth? It is a question that does need to be unpacked a little bit, so let’s start with the power of God.

What are we talking about when we talk about the power of God? The phrase might bring different images or ideas to mind. The Bible certainly bears witness to the fact that God is powerful, and when you think of God’s power what you might think of first are images of God the Creator who made something out of nothing; or you might think of Isaiah’s vision of God the Mighty King who sits on a magnificent throne of splendor; or you might think of God the warrior

who brought down the walls of Jericho and triumphs over enemies. We do see these images in the Bible, but we also see God in Christ giving up the glory of heaven to be clothed in humanity. We see God in Christ taking on the role of a servant, and God in Christ overcoming the power of evil with the power of love. In Jesus, God's power is redefined for us, and it is revealed in Jesus's humility, self-giving, and sacrifice. In Christ, the cross is revealed as the power of God.

We've just recently been through Holy Week and the events that took place that week make it plain that the power of God that is revealed in Christ crucified is a kind of power that humans struggle to understand and embrace. The kind of power that is coveted, and respected, and wielded in this world is self-serving, and it's expressed through dominance. To put that in terms that we might relate to on a more personal level I'd put it this way. We want power because we have learned that we can use our power to get what we want, and the tricky thing is that this is just the air that we breathe in this world. Political dictators and tyrants aside, most of the time, most of us, probably aren't consciously trying to get more power – especially power over other people that we can then use to our advantage, but we do seek the power to direct and shape our lives in the ways we want to, and as we do, we might not be consciously thinking about how a worldly definition of power is influencing us.

For example, we read in Genesis 1 that God created the earth and gave humans *dominion* over the earth. In Genesis 2, we read that God put Adam in the garden to till and keep it. The words translated as till and keep, can also be translated as serve and keep. God's intention is clear from the text – that humans would be caretakers and stewards of the earth, but throughout history that worldly view of power has influenced how the word dominion has been interpreted and applied. Dominion is understood as dominance, and instead of taking a more relationship-oriented view toward creation, where we

help the earth and the earth helps us, people have used this Scripture to justify a more transactional approach toward the earth. *You have what I need, and I have the power to take it.*

One of the first things we can do, if we want to be better stewards of the earth, is recognize where we may have adopted a worldly view of power as we interact with and use the earth's resources. When the Apostle Paul says in Romans, "do not be conformed to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds," we can take those words to heart and open our minds and our hearts to the renewing power and influence of the Holy Spirit who helps us understand and use power differently. Our Gospel passage helps us think more deeply about this.

Mark tells us a story about a woman who had been afflicted for twelve years with some type of illness that resulted in hemorrhaging. You get a sense of her desperation, and you can imagine the hopelessness she might have felt until that day when Jesus was passing by. As he was making his way through the crowd on his way to heal the sick daughter of one of the rulers of the synagogue, the woman managed to get close enough to Jesus to touch the edge of his robe. Immediately, Jesus felt power going out of him, and stopped to figure out who had touched him.

The woman came and revealed herself to Jesus, and Mark says she was trembling with fear. She already knew that something had changed when she touched Jesus, and maybe she was afraid that Jesus would take his power back and reverse the healing she had received. One who views power as a possession to be used for one's benefit alone might have responded in that way, but that wasn't what Jesus did. He allowed his power to be used for the benefit of the woman and he applauded her faith.

This is a straightforward story about one of Jesus's miraculous healings, but I think there is something else here for us that we can apply as we try to answer the question that I asked a few minutes ago. *Is the power of God informing how we approach our relationship with the earth and its resources?* Jesus shows us something here about power and how we use our power in a Jesus-defined way, not a world-defined way, when it comes to caring for the earth. We can see it if we imagine for a moment that the woman, who had been afflicted and suffering for twelve years, represents the earth, afflicted and suffering from years of being dominated by humans who use our power to take what we want from it.

Now, what if we, like Jesus, would be willing to give up a little bit of our power that could help heal our world and stop it from bleeding? What if we didn't cling to our power, using it to get what we want and make ourselves comfortable, but just let it flow out of us for the sake of the creation? What would that look like?

A colleague gave a devotion at the beginning of a meeting I was in a couple of weeks ago, and he was talking about the use of AI. He said something that stuck with me, and I think it relates to the question about what it might look like to let go of some of our power for the sake of healing the earth. He said, the question isn't *can* we use AI, but *should* we? Yes, it gives us power to do lots of things, but what are the costs that come with the use of that power? Just because we can do something doesn't always mean it's the best thing or that we should.

There are lots of things that we *can* do. We *can* remain dependent on consumable energy sources (at least for now) instead of transitioning to the use of more renewable energy sources, but *should* we? We *can* drive our cars everywhere instead of carpooling, or making less trips, or using other forms of transportation, but

should we? We *can* order anything and everything from Amazon which creates massive amounts of plastic waste and increases carbon emissions, but again, should we? We have the power to do all of these things and many more to make our lives simpler or to satisfy our desire to have things, but just because we can doesn't mean we have to.

If we are willing to make it a point to let go of the power that we have to use and abuse the earth's resources for our own selfish gain, we will feel the power going out of us- like Jesus felt his power going out to the woman. There will be things that we have to give up, or new practices to develop that may feel unnatural and awkward. We might have to learn to live with less, and learn to accept a less convenient way of life. These are times when we might feel the weight of Jesus's words about dying to ourselves, but this is also what it looks like to say, yes, the power of God *does* influence the way I relate to the earth and its resources. Choosing to make sacrifices, or choosing to offer our voices to advocate for policies that protect the earth, are ways that we let go of our power in order to tap into power as Jesus defines it and Jesus's power is the power that truly heals and restores relationships - whether it's our relationship with God and people or our relationship with the world that God made.

Caring for creation truly is part of Christian discipleship, and when we frame it in terms of the power of God that Jesus reveals to us, I think it does help us (it helps me!) to understand that. Christian discipleship is about following Jesus – learning from him and learning to be like him. It is about submitting to his rule in every area of our lives and allowing our minds to be changed and our lives to be transformed. Today, maybe we need a bit of mind-changing when it comes to our understanding of how we are meant to live on the earth and be related to it. Jesus is at work in us to transform us, and he sends us to be agents of transformation in the world. When we follow

him and embrace his definition of power and express it, our faith tells us that that is the power that can transform the earth and heal it.

God has given us a beautiful world, and the easy part is appreciating the beauty and the wonder of it. The harder part is the hard part when it comes to any relationship - learning how to love it with self-giving and sacrificial love. May Jesus give us the grace that enables us to love the earth well, even when it may cost us. Amen.