



**“Every Day is Earth Day”**

**Scripture – Psalm 8**

**Sermon Preached by Gregory Knox Jones**

**Sunday, April 24, 2016**

What is one of the best purchases you have ever made that cost less than fifty dollars? Define “best” however you wish. It may be one of your best buys because it gives you the most satisfaction or it has sentimental value or it saves you time or is indispensable to your work. Conjure up this item and why you believe it is so marvelous.

One of my best purchases cost less than twenty dollars. It was a bird feeder. I confess that at age 30, a bird feeder was not even on my radar, but sometime around the age of 40, I purchased my first feeder – a trait I inherited from my parents. In no time, I was captivated by the way birds could soar down at a blinding speed and stop in an instant on the tiny perch. After nibbling a few seeds, they would catapult themselves back into the trees. Part of my fascination was simply the miracle of flight.

The feeder has also proven its worth because it provides sustenance for the birds. It is gratifying to think you have saved the lives of some tiny winged creatures, especially following a snow when food is scarce. The feeder was one of my top purchases because I love to observe the variety of birds, especially those that sport such captivating colors. Don’t you love spotting a brilliant red cardinal, a blue jay, a goldfinch?

However, the main reason the bird feeder ranks so highly was because it helped to change me. It heightened my awareness of the miniature miracles of our planet. We humans are easily awed by the grand features – a spectacular sunset that lights up a turquoise sky with streaks of coral-colored clouds; immense mountains rocketing up from earth with snow-capped peaks; enormous oceans covering 70% of the earth’s surface and teeming with exotic creatures in the depths; the incomprehensible vastness of space and the infinite number of stars dotting the night sky. From an early age I revered these majestic hallmarks of the universe; yet, my first bird feeder helped me awaken to the smaller wonders of the world.

Feeding birds smoothed some of my rough edges. I was not an oblivious elephant trampling through a tulip patch. I recycled, turned down the thermostat in the winter, and turned off lights when I left the room. However, the bird feeder helped to intensify my awareness of the fragile side of creation. Changes in the weather or cutting down forests or pouring chemicals into a river are having profound and lasting repercussions.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was commonly believed that all species of animals that had ever lived were still in existence. When fossils were unearthed of some unknown animal, it was believed that the animal was still out there somewhere but simply had not yet been found. In 1803, when President Thomas Jefferson dispatched Lewis and Clark on their famous expedition to the Northwest, one of his hopes was that they would come upon wooly mastodons roaming the plains. Today, that seems incredibly naïve. Not only do we know

that animals become extinct, but scientists believe that of all the species of animals that have existed, 99% have disappeared from the planet.<sup>1</sup>

Feeding birds pushed me to consider the ways I enhance or diminish God's creation. Gazing at a sunset, hiking a mountain and swimming in the ocean have a minimal effect on the environment, but feeding birds, planting trees, and growing vegetables have a significant impact on the earth.

According to the current secular world view, the earth is an accident. The water, soil, vegetation, and creatures are chance events and it is simply our good fortune to have them at our disposal and to use them as we please.

People of faith see things differently. One of the foundational teachings of Christianity, along with Judaism and Islam, is that God is the creative force behind all that is. God is the energy behind the Big Bang and the ongoing power that brings forth ever-evolving life forms.

Feeding birds deepened my reverence for God's creation. It expanded my awareness that all life is sacred – not simply human life, but all life – because everything is created by God. Feeding birds helped me to grasp what thirteenth century theologian Meister Eckhart meant when he said, "Every creature is a word of God." Not only are human beings created in the image of God, but every element of the universe has a spark of the divine within it. We need to allow Eckhart's words to seep into our souls. "Every creature is a word of God." Can you say this with me? "**Every creature is a word of God.**"

If we listed ways to boost our spiritual lives, we would write such things as pray, read the Bible, worship regularly, live according to Christian values, give generously, help someone in need and work for peace. We must add to our list: cultivate a reverence for God's creation.

Most of us have a diminished sense of enchantment with the world. We take for granted the mind-boggling ecological system God has created and continues to create for sustaining life. Treasuring all of God's creation as sacred should be obvious by the simple truth that this is how the Bible begins. The magnificent poem that speaks of the beginning of the evolving universe by comparing it to a seven day week declares that God's Spirit hovers over the void and God speaks, "Let there be light!"

Science states that the cosmos began with a Big Bang, a Fireball out of which everything in the universe was born. Matthew Fox (our recent Westminster Distinguished Speaker) writes, "We were all 'in the beginning,' because we all share the common atoms that were birthed in the original fireball and subsequent supernova explosions... The light that today's science sheds on our beginnings is awesome and potentially sacred. It can stir us to wonder and gratitude and reverence again, and ignite fresh discussion about our holy beginnings."<sup>2</sup>

Feeding the birds helped to open a place within me where God could work on my soul by reorienting my awareness and multiplying my appreciation of God's incredible creation.

All of us are to some extent takers. We take water to drink, to bathe and to clean. We take trees for lumber to build our homes, dressers and tables. We take vegetation, animals and fish to eat. All of us are takers to some extent and, sadly, some are only takers.

Our Creator wants us to use the resources of the earth to shelter ourselves to feed ourselves and to enjoy life. But that is not all. God also expects us to be good stewards of the earth by cherishing God's creation and renewing the natural environment. God calls us to be not only earthtakers, but also earthkeepers. Feeding birds deepened my resolve to be less of a taker and more of an earth keeper.

When I was a child, the Cold War was at its peak. The threat of nuclear war hung over us like a heavy fog. In school, we did those ridiculous “Duck and Cover” drills where we dove under our desks and covered our heads with our arms. Yes, this should be adequate to survive a nuclear blast! But, rather than calming our anxiety, it planted within our minds the image of the earth dotted with giant mushroom clouds that would spell the end of life on earth.

If, indeed, the earth had a limited future, why worry about preserving the environment for generations that would never be born? We had songs such as “Live for Today” and commercials that encouraged us to “Grab all the gusto” we can.

That mindset continues for many. They see the earth like a store where you are able to take whatever you please from its shelves and not worry about whether they will be restocked for those who come later.

We must overcome any mindset that leads to ravaging the earth. It is urgent for people of faith to embrace the world as a gift from God – a sacred gift that we are to revere and nurture so that we can hand our grandchildren, nieces and nephews a world with pure water, clean air, thriving forests, and plentiful wildlife.

I encourage you to discover your own path that helps you to bless and keep God’s creation. Perhaps working in a freshly tilled garden or becoming more observant of nature when you take a walk or caring for an animal or recycling everything you can or planting trees can increase your appreciation of this gift.

Jesus said we are to love God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. What better way to express our love for God than by loving what God has created?

## NOTES

1. Elizabeth Kolbert, “The Sixth Extinction?” *The New Yorker*, May 25, 2009, p.53.
2. Marc Andrus and Matthew Fox, “Stations of the Cosmic Christ,” (San Francisco: Tayen Lane Publishing, 2016), p.58-59.