

A Baptismal meditation delivered by The Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, July 8, 2007, Pentecost 6, dedicated to Jazmyn Elizabeth Daines who was baptized 7/7/07 and to Grant Ramsey Paullo on this, his baptismal day, and always to the glory of God!

“Our Strangely Warmed Planet”

Genesis 1:26-2:3; Job 12:7-10, Luke 10:1-10, 16-20

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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For the next few minutes, I would like you to imagine that we are on a global spaceship named “Mother Earth.” Mother Earth has been rotating on an axis, in a solar system, around a star named “Sun” for a long time. Our spaceship is a self-contained, self-sufficient, self-regenerating star, which barely interacts with other stars we know to be in existence at varying distances from our star. On our spaceship we find renewal resources, which many of us call “God’s Creation.” We also have non-renewable and often toxic resources, which we often refer to as “Man-made.”

For thousands of years, it seemed like God’s creation could sustain all the residents on Mother Earth for an infinite amount of time. In the generation before mine, when my parents were growing-up, it seemed like, no matter what “Man-made” resources we created, the fullness of God’s creation would offset, absorb, and overcome the non-renewal resources being created by our species on this spaceship.

In 1945, with 2.3 billion people on the spaceship (and this immediately following WWII in which an estimated 18 million people

died), sustainability seemed plausible. Today, we have 6.6 billion people living on Mother Earth. When Grant Ramsey is turning 43 years old, he will be living on a planet with 9.1 billion people. While it took more than 10,000 generations to reach 2 billion, in the course of a single lifetime - ours - we will grow from 2 to 9 billion people.

Soaring population growth is only **one** dramatic change facing **one species** on our spaceship home. Our spaceship's Environmental Control room has lights going off, buzzers sounding, display panels going haywire, and one signal after another alarming the crew and all who live on the craft that our spaceship home is in grave and perilous danger. The control panel tells us - with alarming information and at an increasingly alarming rate - that land, water, and atmospheric degradation, deforestation, global toxification, the extinction of one species after another, are all in the danger zone along with the cultural and human degradation hitting Mother Earth. All of this together has created an ever-increasing, frightening and inconvenient truth. That truth is: all the occupants of our spaceship cannot continue to use and destroy the resources on this carefully balanced spacecraft without destroying the ship itself.

As the alarms are getting louder and the lights flash brighter, as all signs and signals point to a crisis on our spacecraft, we have commanders-in-chief throughout the spaceship who are in seeming denial, one might say they are asleep at the wheel. Some claim the sound and light show flashing before us is a hoax. Although we, as the crew and residents say they seem blind and deaf, as long as we take no corrective actions ourselves, we are no better than they. By saying nothing and doing next to nothing, we tacitly and actively yield to conditions which create an immoral and unethical climate in which our spaceship will implode and sustainable life forms will cease to exist. Our ignorance could produce this effect within one, two or three generations - maybe less - maybe more.

So what can we do as crew and partners to take corrective action on behalf of Mother Earth?

First, we need to acknowledge our own failure to care for this spaceship based on our Judeo-Christian theological foundation. While God intended us to live in harmony with nature, we have more often been at odds with nature. Genesis 1:26 calls us to have “dominion over the earth.” The translation of the word “dominion” from the Hebrew speaks to “taking care of the earth and being in relationship with earth,” not having power over and destroying the earth. As one bumper sticker says, *“It is God’s planet, not our empire.”*

We worship God who created this universe and this planet. Psalm 24:1 says, *“the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.”* Because we have sinned and fallen short of our stewardship of God’s creation, we must confess our sins, accept God’s full redemption and forgiveness and live into God’s love and grace to turn around what we have done. *“All of the creation is groaning in travail,”* scripture says. It is time we commit ourselves to end the groaning and to heal and restore God’s creation to wholeness.

We have to work and fight vigorously to protect and heal Mother Earth. We need to study our scriptures - like Genesis and Job - and realize our place in the cosmos and in our Creator’s plan for the creation. Our God - who declares all creation “good” (Gen. 1:31) and promises care in a covenant with all creatures (Gen. 9:9-17) - delights in all God’s creatures which have no human apparent usefulness (Job 39-41), and God wills in Christ Jesus *“to reconcile all things to himself”* (Col. 1:20). It is now time for us to live each moment of each day to the glory of God and commit ourselves to sustaining God’s earth and the fullness thereof!

Second, we need to see our Christian walkabout on this planet as one which carries a great responsibility. We can start right here at First Church. In April, I challenged us to become “Green.” By

that, I mean as an institution and as individual households of faith, we need to find ways to reuse, recycle, renew, and recreate in our daily lives and our life together.

I have enclosed a great resource in our bulletins today called “Greening our Churches.” DO NOT THROW THIS AWAY! Do not leave it behind. Do not even recycle it, yet. Take it home and check out the links with ministries, worship and educational resources, discipleship and environmental resources. A “green team” has formed and today after services at 9 and 11 they will meet in Room D of the Educational wing to discuss how we as individuals and we as a church can become “Zero Carbon Producers.” I can tell you I hope to see this church add solar panels, make our toilets ecologically friendly, and find creative ways to use less heat, light, and AC in the coming years. This beautiful old building needs upgrades in environmentally and economically friendly ways.

Every committee of this church needs to find ways to strengthen our Stewardship of the earth and our little place on the earth. In House and Grounds, Music and the Arts, Administration, Parish Life, Mission and Education along with the Deacons and Trustees we need to create a statement of purpose and action steps to make us a Green Church!

An example of how our Education Commission can help our children and families is found in Richard Louv’s book, *Last Child in the Woods*. Louv has written this groundbreaking work on the staggering divide between our children and the outdoors. He shows the direct link between exposing our children to nature as essential for their healthy mental, spiritual and physical development.

It is my hope, dream, and challenge to you that we at First Congregational Church live into our name and become the #1 model in America for how a downtown church can become Green and

environmentally friendly in the next five years. Why not us? Why not now?

Dawn George brought me a wonderful story about Father Charles Morris of Wyandotte, Michigan. This story appeared in the July/August issue of the *Sierra Club* magazine. Now the executive director of Michigan Interfaith Power and Light, Fr. Morris started on his environmental path in 1988. In the hot summer of '88, Fr. Morris had a personal conversion experience. He said, “. . . *I realized we needed to do something about global warming. We are a part, not apart from, creation. The vision of the book of Genesis is that humans are put in the garden to till the soil, not to cover it with asphalt.*”

In his working class parish, Fr. Morris first did an energy audit, began to become more energy efficient through weather stripping, upgrading their boiler system and changing lights to compact fluorescents. They saved more than \$8,000 a year in the early years. In time, they added solar panels and wind turbines.

Fr. Morris' true moments of revelation happened when he went up on the roof in his vestments, with his holy water to bless the new solar panels and wind turbines. First, at the exact moment the holy water hit the wind turbine, a gust of wind blew it and started turning. “*The whole crowd gasped,*” he says. It was quite a crowd pleaser! Second, he looked out over the rooftops of the other buildings facing south. Not one of them had solar panels and wind turbines. So he set to work! He adds, “*Churches and schools can afford to take the long view; they're going to be around for a while. They can do things that might not get an immediate pay back but will profit in the long run. Now we're saving \$20,000 a year. There is value added for doing the righteous thing.*”

Let's do the righteous thing for Mother Earth. We live on this tiny spaceship. It is our only home. Global Warming will not go away. But, we can save energy at home and church. We can get

around on less. We can consume less and conserve more. We can be catalysts for change in our neighborhoods, this city, this state, and our nation - ultimately in our world.

One thing, I hope you will join me in doing is to have Columbus City Council join the hundreds of cities in America who have signed the Kyoto Treaty since our federal government refuses to join the other 132 nations of the globe (except Australia) who have joined the global initiative in stopping global warming.

Our work is cut out for us. But, as I look at Ramsey today, as I look at all our children, I feel like it is the least we can do to be in covenant with our God and save the planet God has given into our care. After all, Mother Earth is our only home. We cannot simply abandon her and go to another star. This planet home is all we will ever have for our existence as one star among all the stars.

Amen.