

Sermon for Sunday, June 23, 2024
Midsommar Outdoor Worship: Care for the Earth Sunday

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Today Vasa is beginning a sermon series on Creation and the care of creation. Every once in a while we need to be reminded of the gift of creation that God has given to us and our responsibilities to care for that gift. Today is Earth Sunday. *Earth*. This word has a broad range of meanings. We live on planet *earth* of course. But we also dig in the dirt or toil in the soil. Today I'm going to focus on earth in the sense of the dirt and soil.

Let's begin with a little "soil science." Soil agronomists have established broad classifications for different kinds of dirt including:

- Clay soil: holds water, but doesn't allow plant roots to spread and develop
- Sandy soil: doesn't hold water but allows plant roots to spread and develop
- Silt soil: is easily transported by moving currents and has better water retention
- Loamy soil: combination of sand, silt and clay such that the beneficial properties of each are included. it has the ability to retain moisture and nutrients;

Have you ever considered the word *humus*? As farmers and gardeners we know the value of humus in our soil. It's basically partially decomposed plant or animal matter that enriches our dirt so that plants grow larger and more fruitfully. When we examine the soil of our farm fields or gardens, when we hold it in our hands, we look for the humus because we know that it will help our crops flourish.

But pause for a minute and consider that we call ourselves *humans*. The root of the words humans and humus is the same. The creation story says that humans were created from the dust of the ground. We humans are *dirt people*, people of the soil. And as the final verse in the reading from Genesis reminds us, yes, in the end our remains, our ashes, return to the dust and enrich the soil from which we were created. "You are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Let's turn our attention back to the creation story. In it God places Adam in the garden to till it and keep it. God quickly recognized

that the job of stewarding and caring for the garden was too big for Adam alone. As the second creation story tells it; after searching for and creating multiple animals to be Adam's helper God discovered that there wasn't one that was suitable. So, God created the woman Eve specifically to be a helper and partner in the work of stewarding and caring for the garden.

As you well know we humans fail in God's trust of us. It doesn't take long after being placed in the garden and given great freedom that the humans decide that they want to be like God. And so they eat of the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Yes, they disobey God's command. While their disobedience is an important consideration the root of the problem is that they want to be like God. They want the "mind of God" but God knows that such knowledge will be a bad deal. It will only cause division and strife. Ultimately having this knowledge and understanding forces God to send humans out of the garden and effectively separates the humans from the deep and intimate relationship with God that existed at the beginning of their creation. This relationship is one that we have been longing for ever since.

The gospel good news for today is that God provided a solution that allows for a restoration of that relationship. God does the work. God restores the relationship. As Paul says in the Scripture lesson from Romans, "[Just as] the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many." We are the many, folks. Jesus atoned for the trespasses of the "one man" and restored us, the many, to a forever relationship with God. Jesus atoned for our sins through his death on the cross. This was accomplished through God's grace—God's unearned love for each of us. Jesus provided the means by which the relationship was restored with unbreakable bonds. Nothing on this earth can separate us from the love of God. Nothing can sever that relationship, ever again. (*Pause*)

Just as there are different types of soil that perform best when there is a mix of clay, sand, silt, and humus, it is good knowing that our world is filled with different types of people. We are the humus. We are the people called by God to enrich the world around us. This is not just for our personal benefit but so that the people around us may be enriched and produce their own fruit for the benefit of the world.

Each of us, acting upon the foundational premise that we are loved by God are called to be stewards and caretakers of God's good earth; God's good creation.

We do so not because we are trying to earn a reward, but out of love for all the other humans who share the earth with us now and in the future.

People of the earth: do not be ashamed of who you are or what you are made of. You have been placed here on earth for two reasons: to love God and to love your neighbor.

Let's pray: Creator God, we praise you for your never-ending grace and love for your creation and for us, the humans that inhabit your earth. Bless us this day. Bless the tractors and the drivers. Bless the soil and grant us some drying out time. In your name we pray, Amen.

BTW: did you know that MN has a state soil? It's called Lester Loam and was designated in 2012. The top layer of Lester soil is dark brown, rich in decaying vegetation, and crumbly as cake. Next the subsoil becomes brown, and then dark yellowish brown clay loam.