

**Genesis 1: 26-31**

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, '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.' God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

**Genesis 3:1-6**

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die."' But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

**Revelation 1:4-8**

John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen. 'I am the Alpha and the Omega', says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

**“Down to Earth”****Rev. Charles Schuster****April 18, 2010**

If you go into the Fellowship Hall today, there's a table, these folks have put together some things, some information and there is a checklist of things that you would pledge to do for ecology, for conservation, and if we agree to do some of these things we get a prize, is that right? Yes, we do. I did want to note that we contacted five automobile companies and two of them showed up. So if you go out the east side on Stover Street,

you want to see what a hybrid is, if you don't know, and the information about it. Four cars are there.

A little girl whose name was Lynnette was asked if she thought it was better to be married or single. Lynnette was asked, "Is it better to be married or single?" Nine years old. She said, "It's better for girls to be single, but not for boys. Because boys need somebody to clean up after them." The girls were pretty good at it today, didn't you think? Did you hear the story about the three girls who were picking up trash? Did you hear the story about the three girls who were picking up trash, three girls cleaning up after the boys? Stephanie and Yoko and Dorothy, picking up trash. Picking up lots of trash. Two and a half tons of trash they picked up, and when they finished, Dorothy said, "Good job, ladies." Did you hear the story about the three women who picked up two and a half tons of trash, the story is out of this world, but part of it is right down here on earth, right here in Fort Collins, right here in this church, where Dorothy was a child and a teenager, and grew up. Dorothy grew up in the church. The day before yesterday, she picked up two and a half tons of trash, and put it into the space shuttle. Dorothy Metcalf Lindenberger is an astronaut, and is on the space shuttle, and it began right here. Earth Day, space, trash. Dorothy has come a long way from First Church to outer space.

And so have we. We have come a long way down to earth with what we do with our earth. Smart people have had to learn. Ronald Reagan once said, "If you've seen one redwood tree, you've seen them all." Dr. Edward Teller, father of the atomic bomb, said, "How do we know? Fallout might be good for us." And the health commissioner in Niagara County, New York, in reassuring the residents of the Love Canal area, said, "Most of the chemicals are not a problem for us as far as adverse effects. The stuff you smell isn't necessarily anything to worry about." But we know now, about redwood trees, about fallout, and stuff that smells bad. We're cleaning up the space station. We cleaned up the front of the sanctuary. We're cleaning up the earth. We just didn't know before. We just didn't care. It wasn't important to us. But, you see, we have changed. We have evolved from the childhood of our time to the adolescence of our time to the adulthood, perhaps. Each step some progress, and there's hope for us. There is hope for us.

Let me show you what I mean. First of all, there was a time when we thought we were God, and we could do what we wanted to do. The writer of the Adam and Eve story, the priests, the account of creation, the Yahwehistic account of creation, God tries to warn us. Tells the man and the woman. God tries to tell all of us, "You are not God. Don't you do it. Don't take the apple in the middle of the garden. Be careful with the environment. Be careful with the earth. If you think you're God, you imagine you can do anything you want with everything you have. You can't. In the childhood of our days, we thought we were God.

An eight-year-old returned to school the day after report cards had been issued and sent home. He said to his teacher, "I don't want to scare you, but my father said if I don't get better grades, somebody is going to get spanked." Another child committed a major breach of etiquette, or some violation of family law, and she stood, all four-foot something of her height, in front of her two parents and said, "You can't touch me, I'm

baptized." In the childhood of our years, we have imagined ourselves to be gods, and God said, "Don't eat the apple. Be careful what you do. There are consequences."

A young man called his insurance agent. His voice was hurried and excited. "Can I insure my house?" The agent said, "Of course you can. Let's set up a time. I'll come over and look at your house." And the young man answered, "Well, could we do this over the phone?" The agent said, "I'm sorry, I'll have to come over to your house first." And the homeowner said, "Well, you'd better hurry up and get out here, because the place is on fire." Consequences. It was Winston Churchill who said of us, "Americans will always do the right thing. Americans will always do the right thing, after they've tried everything else." Well, we've tried everything else. In our childhood era, we thought we could put off caring about things, and then we discovered that we pollute. We thought we could just throw stuff out the window, and then we discovered it comes back into our door. It's like the guy who wrote Ann Landers, years ago. "Dear Ann. I've got to decide between a new car and getting engaged. I really love this wonderful woman, but every night when I go to sleep, I dream about the car." In our childish days, we have dreamed about our cars and forgotten about the consequences of driving them. We know better. We all know better. Even the Methodist bishops know better, and they've written, it's on the front of our bulletin, "This beautiful natural world is a loving gift from God, and we must see ourselves as instruments of God's renewing spirit, and be a blessing to all creation." In other words, don't eat the apple.

John Muir said it beautifully. "Everybody needs beauty as well as bread. Everybody needs places to play in and places to pray in where nature can heal and give strength to the body and to the soul." We are not God, but we are recipients of God's good grace, and we know now, and we have learned it from childhood of our age when we thought we could do anything we wanted, with everything we have.

Secondly, there is an adolescence of our time on earth. It is a time when we are timid and a bit uncertain in trying to find our identity, who we are, and trying to discover in this age what we can do. And the writer of the creation story, the priestly writer, tells us that we are made in the image of God. "And God said, let us make them in our image. Male and female, God created us." A period of time when we're searching for our identity, a period of human life when we thought we were strong, but somehow felt weak. A period of years and decades when we never thought of the whole earth, only the part of it where we are, and we began to mature, and as a species find ourselves. And God said, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it." Now, here's an important point. Subdue the earth. The actual Hebrew word is rada. It does not mean exploit the earth, as some have thought. It means care for the earth. It means nurture the earth. If we are in the image of God, we then, the writer tells us, should relate to the Creation like the Creator relates to what has been created. Rada means in the image of the creator, to be creator to creation. To care for the earth as if we made it.

In the adolescence of our age we have learned to take responsibility for the earth. It is our earth, it's up to us. There's a cartoon that shows a teenager who has spiked hair and low-slung jeans and several nose rings and a tattoo on his neck that says "Anarchy Now." He

said to a friend one time, "I really don't like looking this way, but it keeps my parents from dragging me everywhere they go." He wanted to be left alone, and in our adolescence of our species, we have wanted to isolate ourselves and to be left alone. In our adolescence we opted out. The story of the Scottish student who was admitted to Oxford University, moved into a dorm room, his mother was worried about how the British students would accept him. She called him one day and she said, "How do you find the English students, Donald?" He said "Oh, Mother, they are a strange and noisy people. The one on one side of my bed, he bangs his head against the wall at night, and he won't stop. And the one on the other side of my bed, in his bed he screams and swears and curses till the sun comes up at dawn." "Oh Donald," said his mother, "how do you put up with them?" And Donald answered, "I ignore them, Mother. I just sit here quietly every night playing my bagpipes."

We are made in the image of God. We can sit and play our bagpipes. We can bang our heads against the wall, or we can scream out at night. Bill Coffin was right when in said in the last century, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we created a world for some of us. It's time in this century, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to create a world for all of us. There comes a time when we do what we know is right because we realize there is so much at stake, than what is obvious, so we evolve into a concern for all people everywhere. Henry Ford once said, "If I made them what they told me that they wanted, I would have built them a faster horse." But we look at what we need, which often is different than what we think we want, and new ages teach new duties. Let us make them in the image of God, God said, and we know that, and it's not about me and mine, it's about us and ours. A volcano erupts in Iceland and air travel comes to a halt from North America to Europe. See, we're all in this together.

Bruce Babbit was Secretary of the Interior years ago. He had a group of children kind of like what we had today, and he asked them the question, "Why should we try to save endangered species?" Gabriel answered, "Because God gave us the animals." Gina said, "Because we love them." George said, "Because we would be lonely without them," and Alicia said, "Because they are part of our life. If we didn't have them, it wouldn't be a complete world. They have been given to us to be enjoyed, not destroyed." Bruce Babbit then, Secretary of the Interior, said, "Of all the advisors who have tried to ignite my passion for that, nothing did like the children." Children and adults who now understand that we are in the image of God and our job is rada, to care for God's creation.

In the childhood of our species, we thought that we could eat the apple. We thought we were God, that we could do as we pleased. In the adolescence of our species, we realized we had responsibility. We saw that we are in the image of God and that we are the caretakers of Creation, and we're all in this thing together. Finally, finally in the adulthood of our time, for the first time, we're beginning to understand how God is the omega and the alpha, how God is the end, as we understood God is the beginning. Perhaps as Christians we're getting clear on what the Trinity means, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Creator, the Redeemer, the Sustainer, the God who was at creation, who is in the presence of Jesus Christ and for us the God who will forever be in the Holy Spirit, forever, in all the forevers that come. The continuity of God, past, present, and

future. In the adulthood of our time, we look for the longer view, for the distant view, for the time beyond our time, and the people who will live in it. A bigger picture.

Two weeks ago, Pitkin Street, just around the corner, a little black van with lights and a camera took my picture. It isn't the first time. I know where they park that van. I saw it. I noticed the sign that said "Speed limit 25." I'm doing 27. So what do you do? You pay the fine, I guess. Two miles, maybe one mile over the limit, give me a break! One of the church members told me about a guy, 25 miles was the limit, he was doing 23 and the van with the lights took his picture. He saw it happen. Two miles an hour under the limit. He went around the block, he was doing 25, he looked right at the speedometer, and again the van clicked. The pictures, the lights came on, took his picture again. Went around the block a third time. This time he was doing 27, and again took his picture the third time. Well, he had them. Three pictures, three speedometer readings, and he planned to take it to court, and knew he would win, until he got three tickets, three tickets taken by the van with the lights, and he had to pay. For not wearing his seat belt. Sometimes, what we see is limited to what we think we know, and we need to take the longer look.

Thomas Freedman writes about the greatest generation, his parents who fought and sacrificed so that we could live in freedom. Talks about his uncle Jim, his B17 was shot down over Germany in 1945 in the spring and he lived to tell about it. And in recent years Jim died. On his gravestone, the words, given to those in the greatest generation, the people whose sacrifice took the long view of history, it read, the gravestone read, "He gave his today for our tomorrow." He gave his today for our tomorrow. That's what is on our minds today, the long view. We aren't just thinking about our time on earth, we're thinking about those who will come after us. For God is the alpha and the omega, and we are responsible for the unseen future as well as the immediate present. Freedman calls it regeneration. He says the world expects us to lead, Americans. The world needs us to lead. And he goes on to say, "Our ability to thrive as a country in the future requires that we lead. We have done it before," he said, "And we will do it again."

God is the alpha and the omega. The adulthood of our time, and we know it, calls for us to prepare and preserve what is to be. We see it now. It's clear. Nine-year-old Lynnette, she thought it's better for girls to be single, but not for boys, because boys need somebody to clean up after them. The truth is, we need somebody to clean up after all of us, and we would want to do some cleaning up ourselves. Richard Cushing, Cardinal Cushing, a great leader in the Catholic church, wrote, years ago, "If all the sleeping folks would wake up, if all the lukewarm folks would fire up, if all the disgruntled folks would sweeten up, if all the discouraged folks would cheer up, if all the depressed folks would look up, if all the estranged folks would make up, if all the gossiping folks would shut up, if all the dry bones would shake up.....", and we would add, if all the adults in the world would clean up, if that could happen, Cushing adds, "we could have the greatest renewal the world has ever seen." And God, who is alpha and omega, the beginning of Creation, as well as the end of time, is waiting for us to grow up. It think it's what Jesus meant when he prayed, when he prayed, "on earth as it is in heaven."