

# FOR THE BEAUTY OF THE EARTH

Sunday, March 22, 2018

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God created Paradise. And it wasn't enough.

<sup>3</sup> And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. <sup>4</sup> And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.

But it wasn't enough. Human tamed fire and used it to light the night. But it wasn't enough. Human captured gas and used it to fill the night with light and power machines. But it wasn't enough. Human captured lightning and used it to develop electric machines. But there wasn't enough lightning. Surely God wept.

<sup>10</sup> God called the dry land Earth,<sup>[d]</sup> and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

But it wasn't enough, so human dug into the earth to find more energy for more power. Human harnessed the waters that flowed for more power. Into the oceans and rivers human dumped anything human didn't want. Surely God wept.

<sup>11</sup> And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants<sup>[e]</sup> yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so. <sup>12</sup> The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

But it wasn't enough. So human plundered the forests for the trees to build homes and factories and to burn as fuel for more light and more energy. And separated the vegetation, one from the other, and made each kind another kind.

<sup>14</sup> And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons,<sup>[f]</sup> and for days and years, <sup>15</sup> and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. <sup>16</sup> And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. And God saw that it was good.

But it wasn't enough. Human wasn't satisfied with just having dominion over earth and air. Human gathered more energy to try to reach the stars. The air was filled with the smoke and dust from the machines so that human can barely see the stars. Surely God wept.

<sup>21</sup> So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

But it wasn't enough. Human was running out of energy. Human plunged the depths of the ocean for oil, soiled the sea and the land around it. Human dragged the sea creatures from their homes and made them into energy, and threw out what they didn't like. And poured more smoke and soot into the air making it hard for creatures of the air to breathe. Surely God wept.

<sup>24</sup> And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds.

But it wasn't enough to plunder the vegetation. And it wasn't enough to eat the animals. Human was bored and needed sport. So Human destroyed many of the creatures living on the earth and in the air. Surely God wept.

When God said "Let us make man<sup>[h]</sup> in our image, after our likeness" and God blessed them, surely God must have wept.

For I do not believe in a God who creates something so beautiful, gives it away, and then destroys it so methodically and does not feel sorrow. I do not believe in a God who turns away from humankind in their distress, who abandons humankind in their sorrow. I do believe in a God who weeps. I do believe in a God who believes that, by coming to earth and dwelling among us in Jesus, we would be saved from ourselves. God renew in us the promise...of...what...the Promised Land? The paradise. Do we have to destroy it all to get to the end? Are we in such a hurry for the end times that we live fast and without consideration for this time?

*The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.*

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It isn't even ours. It is a place for us to dwell in peace and harmony. Look what we have done to it. Look at the whole earth, not just our beautiful plot of land. Or, better yet, look at our plot, your plot, and then really look at the rest of the world in comparison. God created all of it. And Jesus died for our sins, not just against one another but for the sins against nature as well. How do we justify what we are doing to the earth? How do we excuse what we are doing to the world? Do we even know what we are doing to the world?

How goes your day? Do you start with a cup of coffee? From Guatemala, Africa? You get dressed. Are your clothes made in China, Bangladesh, Indonesia? Is that how you connect with the rest of the world? Then we spend 87% of our day indoors, another 6% in our vehicles. How can we connect with the earth? It takes intent to connect. In His Laudato Si, which we studied last year on Tuesdays, the Pope makes this point, that human life is one part of God's interconnected creation. All that we create, culture, economy, spiritual beliefs and political systems are not separate from the natural world.

I couldn't possibly share all that I want about the problems on our earth so I plan to focus on one, mostly. But first a sort of general comment. Please raise your hand if you know what Overshoot Day is? From the Global Footprint Network, Overshoot Day is the moment when we have used up our yearly allotment of resources, renewable and otherwise, for the year. That means for the remainder of the year we are 'borrowing' from future years, future

generations. This has been calculated every year since 1969. If any of you have ever carried a balance on your credit card then you can sort of imagine what is happening. We can't pay it back in the current year so we will be paying it with interest in the years to come. This year Overshoot Day is slated for some time in July. In recent years it has been in August, creeping earlier and earlier. I took the survey at the end thinking, I'm pretty good at the whole recycle/reuse thing and found, to my dismay, that if everyone on earth lived as I do it would take 4.5 earths to sustain us for a year. That's depressing. Australia is in third place, the US is in 5th. India is at the bottom requiring only half the world to exist. We could all live a little more like that...eat less meat and dairy, buy less stuff, drive less and use public transport more. And stop polluting the air and water! By cutting just food waste in half it is possible to extend Overshoot day 11 days. Reducing protein moves it 30 days. Reduce carbon emissions by 50% and we move it 89 days!

## Slide Show 2

What is more important to you, air or water? If you are like me you might say, "I don't drink the water." But of course, I do, we all do. Whether it is from the tap, in a bottle or disguised in a juice or soda, we consume water. And all that grows in the earth needs water. And we breathe the air. And all living things need these to live. 3 minutes without oxygen, 3 days without water, 3 weeks without food. We have about 84 years of clean breathable air left at the current rate of destruction and pollution. That gives us a little time. We have already reached a tipping point for fresh water. There are already vast areas on earth without water, clean or otherwise!

So I chose the water. It is our baptism. It is such an important resource, and has become a very important commodity. Wars are fought over it, alliances are made with regard to it. It has been trapped, regulated, rationed, and yet it is wild and uncontrollable at best. Now, studies show that freshwater scarcity is becoming a threat to human society.

But where is all that water going? Here are some interesting figures.

It takes roughly **20 gallons** of water to make a pint of beer,

As much as **132 gallons** of water to make a 2-liter bottle of soda,

A fast-food quarter-pounder costs \$3, and used **1,300 gallons** of water in 2008.

A single pound of beef takes, on average, **1,800 gallons** of water.

**It takes some 2,000 gallons of water to produce one gallon of Cow Milk,**

roughly twice as much as is required for a **gallon** of Almond Milk.

The **water** footprint of one pound of cotton is **1,320 gallons**.

That's over **650 gallons** of **water** for one new cotton t-shirt.

The average American's daily water footprint for all the non-food household goods we purchase, use and throw away is **583 gallons**. Daily.

Those numbers are going down. But we don't stop there. Human must make something new. It takes time to become efficient, and it is costly. Bottom line is, of course, money.

Take a cell phone. The amount of water used to dilute the waste products to meet pollution limits is the largest portion of the overall water footprint. This adds up to 3,190 gallons for one phone. Are there enough phones out there yet? Do we need a new one every year?

This morning I decided to stop buying drinks in cans and plastic bottles. The amount of water to manufacture a plastic bottle is double the amount of water it holds. If it holds anything other than water, well, the figures just keep rising. And I have a couple of gift cards from Starbucks and Peets that I decided to cash in when I found out it takes 53 gallons of water to make my latte. Maybe more since mine is decaf.

Manufacture is not the only demand on the earth water resources. Of course, people need water for food and survival. The poorest people on earth are unable to feed themselves because the earth is water poor. There is conflict over rights to any water available. Urbanization, and rising consumption degrade the lands. Of the world's largest 37 aquifers, 21 have passed their tipping points. More water has gone out than in over a decade.

While I always took the drought in California seriously, I never compared it to other poorer lands in the world. We are so comfortable. We live in wonderful houses. Once, we grew lawns and flowers and filled swimming pools. In the central valley the farmers are digging more wells. They need that water. California produces more food than any other states. And we are the driest. So, as a result of gouging the water table sea water is creeping into the fresh water aquifers.

We clear land, clear cut the land, degrade the land. We introduce feral animals, take out the top predators changing the landscape and the water ways. We unbalance the marine ecosystem by overfishing. Isn't that enough?

There is enough. We can change things, every day, today, right now! We were commanded to have dominion over the world. Like good rulers we should be taking care of our charges. We were commanded to be good stewards of the land, good shepherds. We depend on the land and the land depends on us. The world and everything in it is the Lord's. We are not watching out for the earth, for each other..

***Genesis 1:28 And 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 heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."***

In the last two centuries hundreds of species have gone extinct due to human activity. Compare that to the normal rate of millions of years for species to disappear.

There was a time when survival depended on repopulating. However, earth is now at its limit of what it can support. Overpopulation is an epidemic. We humans take up space, but our industries take up tons of space. Clear cutting, mining, drilling all take a toll and all affect the water.

So while we use up ground water, and the temperature rises, glaciers are melting at alarming rates causing flooding. Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink. Already we have lost coral and many species of fish that support healthy oceans. And don't get me started on the 8 million tons of plastic trash dumped into the ocean every year. Choking. Poisoning. Starving. Acid rain destroying forests and fish.

It is imperative that we support the earth that we live on, but no matter what, the earth will live on. Human impacts the natural habitat in so many ways and we need to be aware of our personal environmental input. Whether we live with it or not solely depends on the decisions and actions we make next. The earth will go on without us. Not the same. While it can green again, the landscape will not return to what it was before. That is gone. Nature is unrelenting, unforgiving, so it is probably best if we treat her well, and maybe, just maybe we can make up for the damage that has already been dealt. The best time to act, was yesterday, the best we can do is today, but if we wait for tomorrow, it may just be too late.

One more look at mountaintop removal coal mining, often described as "strip mining on steroids". 800,000 acres of forest have been destroyed as 470 mountains have been sheared off. What happens to all that soil and debris is that it is pushed off the mountain, into the valleys below where the streams and rivers flowed. In just a few decades more than 2,400 miles of streams and headwaters that provide drinking water for millions have been permanently buried and destroyed. And after coal is burned in power plants the solid waste streams into landfills to flow into the groundwater, toxic, a risk to human health and the environment.

Without help it will take hundreds of years for a forest to re-establish itself on the mine sites. We don't have that time. We'll run out of fresh air before then. What are we to do? To heal creation we need to change our behavior. There is really enough. To paraphrase Gandhi, the earth is sufficient to supply all our needs, just not all our greeds. Here are things for us to do. Visit public lands, waters, monuments, historic sites that contribute to a sense of place, a sense of peace. Write to Congress to express support for the continuation of the Antiquities Act and the Land and Water Conservation Fund, for the sake of your children and their children. Plant natives to help the birds and pollinators. COMPOST. Buy less and throw out less. If everyone reduced their waste by half we could move that Overshoot Day 3 months. Drive less, walk more. Drink your tap water, from a glass. And thank God for that water. 80% of all clean water goes into agriculture. You have to eat. So, eat fresh, buy local, grow your own, and share it with your neighbors. The more it's processed, the more water is used up in food production.

Celebrate Jesus' baptism and your own by giving thanks for the water, every time you drink! We are to take care of the earth. The care we give to the earth extends to all people of the earth and vice versa.

Chief Lawrence Hart, a southern Cheyenne, has this to say. "The Earth is for the circle of people. And since the earth is for the whole, no one individual can own any part of it. The earth belongs to the Creator, and is gifted to peoples."

Give thanks for the Earth, and everything in it. Celebrate. Amen.