

Who Owns The Land?  
A Sermon By Bill Eagle  
Earth Day April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023

**Leviticus 25: 18, 19 & 23**

18" ` Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live safely in the land. 19Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live there in safety

23" ` The land must not be sold permanently, **because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants**

**Revelation 11 15-18**

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ,  
and he will reign for ever and ever."

16And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17saying:

"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,  
the One who is and who was,  
because you have taken your great power  
and have begun to reign.  
18The nations were angry;  
and your wrath has come.  
The time has come for judging the dead,  
and for rewarding your servants the prophets  
and your saints and those who reverence your name,  
both small and great--  
**and for destroying those who destroy the earth."**

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This is the Soil... a piece of ground, the loose top layer of the Earth's Surface.

From the soil comes our homes, our food, our very lives. From this substance we were formed, and to this substance, we will some day return.

This is water, the very essence of all life; at least life as we know it.

The ancient Hebrews wrote prayers to give thanks for the gifts of the soil. These prayers are still said today by modern Jews:

"Blessed art Thou Oh Eternal our God King of the Universe giver of the fruit of the vine and for the produce of the field, and for that desirable, good and spacious land that you granted our ancestors to inherit, to eat of its fruit, and be satisfied with it's goodness"

The ancient Hebrews realized that what we have is a "gift of God" and that we are Stewards of Gods creation.

A steward is some one that is given the charge to take care of their master's property.

... And the Earth is the Lords.

The year 2021 made an indelible mark in the annals of weather history. It was the hottest in recorded history.

Models predict that as the world consumes ever more fossil fuel, greenhouse gas concentrations will continue to rise, and Earth's average surface temperature will rise with them. Based on plausible emission scenarios, average surface temperatures could rise between 3° and 7° by the end of the 21st century. The Permian Great extinction occurred some 252 million years ago. It was the

greatest extinction even in our world's history. 96% of all life on earth perished. It was brought about by global warming. It was brought about volcanic eruptions which put additional greenhouse gases into our atmosphere. It took almost a million years for our planet to recover.

There are presently dead spots developing in both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Oxygen deficient spots where no marine life can exist. We are seeing increased carbon dioxide levels causing acidification of our oceans. Fragile coral reefs are now dying. Along with reefs we are seeing the disappearance of a multitude of different types of plants and animals.

Increased carbon levels can be traced from the present back to the beginning of the industrial revolution

Everything really isn't all that beautiful with our modern world.

During the 1960's the Kingston Trio recorded the "Merry Minuet"

Written by Sheldon Harnick © 1958

*They're rioting in Africa. They're starving in Spain.*

*There's hurricanes in Florida, and Texas needs rain.*

*The whole world is festering with unhappy souls.*

*The French hate the Germans, the Germans hate the Poles.*

*Italians hate Yugoslavs, South Africans hate the Dutch.*

*And I don't like anybody very much!*

*But we can be tranquil and thankful and proud,*

*for man's been endowed with a mushroom-shaped cloud.*

*And we know for certain that some lovely day, someone will set the spark off...*

*and we will all be blown away.*

*They're rioting in Africa.*

*There's strife in Iran.*

*What nature doesn't do to us... will be done by our fellow man.*

If you don't know me, or anything about my background, let me share: I worked 35 years for the Soil Conservation Service (now called the Natural Resources Conservation Service). I was the District Conservationist for Columbia and Clatsop Counties. I retired January 2000. While I was still working, I was instrumental in the formation of all three of our Counties Watershed Councils and one of Clatsop County's. I also helped establish the Friends of Fox Creek group in Rainier. I am presently an elected Director of the Columbia Soil and Water Conservation District, and I have served as chairs of Both the County and the City of St. Helens Parks Commissions.

Many people and many churches don't understand that caring for Creation is something that would benefit all of us. It should be something that transcends ordinary politics. It doesn't though, not when it impinges on profits.

Our Church (PCUSA) is not the only denomination that supports an environmental ethic. The American Baptist Church, USA, Church of The Brethern, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal Church USA, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Mennonites, Quakers, Reformed Church in America, Roman Catholic Church, Unitarian Universalist Association, United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church all are willing to take a stand on environmental issues. All believe that water, air, soil, minerals, energy, resources, plants, animal life and space are to be valued and conserved because they are God's creation and not solely because they are useful to human beings. They acknowledge that God has granted us stewardship of creation and we should meet these stewardship duties through acts of loving care and respect.

There is a Mexican Saying "**No enlodes el aqua, a lo major la tendras que tomar.**"

Don't muddy the water; you may have to drink it someday.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America produced a slide program called "To Adam With Love."

Adam was given a Gift from God... It was a world. A beautiful world and he was allowed to live in it. It had trees, animals, water, and food, just for the taking. Adam really enjoyed the world that God gave him. He hunted the animals for food, he cut trees to make a home, and he picked wild berries. But he wasn't just satisfied with what he needed. He found the river a great place to throw his trash and debris. He found it was easier to pull berry bushes out by the roots, than individually picking berries. He didn't just stop with hunting animals for food, he started killing them because he enjoyed the thrill of the hunt.

Our Adam was careless with fire. As a result of his carelessness, flames consumed both his home and all the trees. The debris that he dumped into the river, polluted the water, and also restricted the water flow, and during a heavy rain caused the river to flood. His indiscriminate killing managed to drive all of the animals away, and his destruction of food plants left him with nothing to eat. In the end Adam has nothing.

What does Adam say in response?

Adam said: "Oh God, what ever did I do to deserve this?"

We need to realize that all we have, all that this world has to offer is a "gift of God" and that we are stewards of Gods Creation

As I have already stated: A steward is someone that is given the responsibility of taking care of someone else's property.

...And the Earth is the Lords.

I have had the opportunity to teach outdoor school to 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders. One of the lessons that I teach involves water. I usually begin the lesson by telling them about an event in recent history.

Recent, to me, but to kids and other it is of a time before they were born. On August 29<sup>th</sup>, 1979, the space probe Voyager was launched. The mission of this probe was to explore the outer planets. It was designed to visit the moons of Jupiter and Saturn, designed to look at the make up of Uranus and Neptune, and then to see what might be in the outer space beyond our solar system. Voyager was looking for something special, something very important. I usually ask my students what was it that Voyager was looking for?

The answer is "Water"

Why water? Because water is the very essence of all life... 70% of our bodies are made up of water. We drink water, we bath in water, we farm with water, we use water for commerce. Fortunes have been founded on water, and wars have been fought over it.

Most of the water that we have here on earth, has always been here. It is recycled and, in most cases, very ancient. I discuss the water cycle with my students. I tell them that the water they drink is probably the same water that the dinosaurs drank. Kids will often respond with: "Eeeeeeswww Dinosaur water Yuch!" Nevertheless, our water is limited and needs to be recycled, and reused again, and again, and again...Pure water is very much at a premium.

There are things that we all take for granted. We take for granted the air we breathe, the water we drink and the sun that warms us. Yet, it's this combination that provides us with our very existence.

I am pleased to say that the Presbyterian Church is willing to take a stand and support environmental justice. Many Presbyterians believe, that we owe our children the opportunity to enjoy a future. Our Church helped establish "Presbyterians for Earth Care," a

Nation wide Eco-Justice Network. In 1990, the 202nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) adopted the policy report *"Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice."* The report called for Presbyterians to focus on caring for creation as a central concern, and incorporated this concern into the life and mission of our church. Jenny Holms from our own Presbytery of the Cascades moderates this group.

I often think of Proverbs 14:12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but will lead him to destruction.

The story of the Lorax, (which I originally planned to share as part of our Children's sermon) echoes this proverb.

Let me share a part of this book with you..

The story of the Lorax begins when a man called Once-ler discovers a valley where wonderful plants known as Truffula trees grow. In the valley we have birds, animals, and fish. Pure water and happy creatures. From Truffula trees many wonderful things can be produced. The Once-ler discovers that he can cut the trees down and make some very wonderful products from them. No sooner does he cut a tree down, than a being called the Lorax visits him.

To quote Dr. Seuss:

"Mister" he says with a saw dusty sneeze,

"I am the Lorax, I speak for the trees.

I speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongues.

And I'm asking you, sir, at the top of my lungs" -

He was very upset as he shouted and puffed-

"What's that THING you've made out of my Truffula Tuft?"

The Once-ler replies:

"Look Lorax, there's no cause for alarm.

I chopped just one tree, I'm doing no harm.

I'm being quite useful. This thing is a thneed.  
 A thneed's a Fine-Something-that-All-People-Need!  
 It's a shirt. It's a sock. It's a glove. It's a hat  
 But it has other uses, Yes, far beyond that.  
 You can use it for carpets. For pillows! For sheets!  
 Or curtains! Or covers for bicycle seats!"

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The Once-ler hires other helpers, and he builds a factory. The  
 business does quite well, and he finds it advantageous to enlarge.

Says Once-ler:

I meant no harm. I most truly did not.  
 But I had to grow bigger. So bigger I got.  
 I biggered my factory. I biggered my roads.  
 I biggered my wagons. I biggered the loads  
 Of the Thneeds I shipped out. I was shipping them forth  
 To the South! To the East! To the West! To the North!  
 I went right on biggering...selling more Thneeds.  
 And I biggered my money, which everyone needs.

In the process of getting bigger Once-ler manages to pollute the  
 water, and foul the air. He does this as well as ruin habitat for the  
 creatures that live in the Truffula trees.

The Lorax tries to lecture Once-ler. Because of this Onceler loses  
 his temper.

"And then I got mad.

I got terribly mad.

I yelled at the Lorax, "Now listen here, Dad!

All you do is yap-yap-yap and say, 'Bad! Bad! Bad! Bad!

Well, I have my rights, sir, and I'm telling you

I intend to go on doing just what I do!

And , for your information, you Lorax, I'm figguring on Biggering

And Biggering



And Biggering  
And Biggering

Turning MORE Truffula Trees into Thneeds  
Which everyone, EVERONE, EVERYONE needs!"

About this time Once-ler cuts his very last Truffula tree. Nothing more remains, but stumps, his factory, polluted water and polluted air.

And the Once-ler now has absolutely nothing .

The Lorax leaves

The Once-ler's weakness? He couldn't project. He was unable to realize the consequences of his actions. All he could see was the "now", not the "What will or can be"

To Quote Dr. Seuss again:

And all that the Lorax left here in this mess  
Was a small pile of rocks, with one word...  
"UNLESS"  
Whatever that meant, will I just couldn't guess.

That was long, long ago  
But each day since that day  
I've sat here and worried  
And worried away.  
Through the years, while my buildings  
Have fallen apart,  
I've worried about it  
With all of my heart.

"But NOW" says Once-ler,  
 "Now that your're here,  
 the word of the Lorax seems perfectly clear.  
 UNLESS someone like you  
 Cares a whole awful lot,  
 Nothing is going to get better.  
 It's not.

"So...  
 Catch!" calls the Once-ler  
 He lets something fall.  
 "It's a Truffula seed.  
 It's the last one of all!  
 You're in charge of the last of the Truffula Seeds.  
 And Truffula Trees are what everyone needs.  
 Plant a new Truffula. Treat it with care.  
 Give it clean water. And feed it fresh air.  
 Grow a forest. Protect it from axes that hack.  
 Then the Lorax  
 And all of his friends  
 May come back."

Unless....

When Adam ate of the fruit of the tree he knew both good and evil.  
 He became more than just a clever animal.  
 God gave him, gave us, power over all the earth, and in the process  
 made us stewards of this planet. A steward is a person who is  
 supposed to take care of another persons property. We don't own  
 this world, This world belongs to God.

This is water, the very essence of all life; at least life as we know it. This is Soil, the foundation for our world. The medium of growth for our crops.

This is a plant, it grows in the soil, it is nurtured by water, and with it we are nurtured as well.

I tell the children that I work with that they are our next generation. I tell them that they have tremendous power. They have the power to change the world. Their generation will be able to change this world either for better, or for worse. They will decide.

We as human beings have that ability. We have free will. We can decide how we will treat the world. We as a church have a responsibility. We have a responsibility to care for Gods creation. We can make the earth a better place, or we can destroy what God has given us.

Genesis 1:22 And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.

The Psalm reads The Earth is the Lords, and the fullness thereof.

The Earth is the Lords... and it's our job to take care of what God has given us.

So instead of us concluding by saying "Amen" (so be it) Let us conclude with "THIS IS THE WORK OF THE CHURCH"