

Genesis 9:8-13

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 'As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

Psalm 65:6-13

By your strength you established the mountains;
you are girded with might.
You silence the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves,
the tumult of the peoples.
Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs;
you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.

You visit the earth and water it,
you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water;
you provide the people with grain,
for so you have prepared it.
You water its furrows abundantly,
settling its ridges,
softening it with showers,
and blessing its growth.

You crown the year with your bounty;
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.
The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,
the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,
the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together for joy.

For the Beauty of the Earth

Slide: Seed Catalogues

I begin by noting that I have modified the order of the Lenten Series as it appears in the devotional. I did this for several reasons.

As I have been making visits in these past weeks I have been noticing seed catalogues of all kinds adorning coffee tables and stands near reading lights. Gardeners of every kind are gearing up. I have been asked numerous times if I have started my seedlings. I am starting to hear news reports on crop insurance, subsoil moisture levels, and seed varieties. While the snow outside continues, farmers and gardeners are dreaming of green pastures. It seemed a good season to speak into the question of the healing journey as it relates to the land.

Secondly, the journey healing among nations and peoples seemed particularly connected to the drama and meaning of Holy Week. So that has been pushed to April 2nd. Just modify your resources in the Lenten guide.

Slide: CHEP Garden Patch

A striking illustration and quote that framed my approach to the journey of healing on the land comes from Robin Wall Kimmerer in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

I wonder if much that ails our society stems from the fact that we have allowed ourselves to be cut off from that love of, and from, the land. It is medicine for broken land and empty hearts.

Larkin used to complain mightily about weeding. But now when she comes home, she asks if she can go dig potatoes. I see her on her knees, unearthing red skins and Yukon Golds and singing to herself. Larkin is in graduate school now, studying food systems and working with urban gardeners, growing vegetables for the food pantry on land reclaimed from empty lots. At-risk youth do the planting and hoeing and harvesting. The kids are surprised that the food they harvest is free. They've had to pay for everything they've ever gotten before. They greet fresh carrots, straight from the ground, with suspicion at first, until they eat one....

In a garden, food arises from partnership. If I don't pick rocks and pull weeds, I'm not fulfilling my end of the bargain. I can do these things with my handy opposable thumb and capacity to use tools... But I can no more create a tomato or embroider a trellis in beans than I can turn lead into gold. This is the planet's responsibility and their gift: animating the inanimate. Now there is a gift.

People often ask me what one thing I would recommend to restore relationship between land and people. My answer is almost always, "Plant a garden." It's good for the health of the earth and it's good for the health of people. A garden is a nursery for nurturing connections, the soil for cultivation of practical reverence. And its power goes far beyond the garden gate—once you develop a relationship with a little patch of earth, it becomes a seed itself. Something essential happens in a vegetable garden. It's a place

where if you can't say "I love you" out loud, you can say it in seeds. And the land will reciprocate, in beans.¹

Slide: Rainbow on the Wintery Prairie

This quote brought to my mind the scripture texts which Eric earlier read. It is imperative for us to recognize the covenants God makes in Genesis 9. As a recap these include the following: humans, birds, domestic and wild animals, and the earth itself. The promise of the rainbow was for all of these. There is an inter-related covenantal relationship humans have with the land and creatures of the land. Perhaps the Dodo knew this, but not the humans who came upon its island home in the 16th century.

The dodo is an extinct flightless bird last seen in the 16th century native to an island east of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean. The dodo's closest genetic relative was the also-extinct Rodrigues solitaire. The two formed the subfamily Raphinae; birds that were a part of the family which includes pigeons and doves.² Perhaps the urban pigeons nesting on our bridges understand this to be some kind non-violent retribution from past injustices to the larger clan.

The upshot is that humans have a particular responsibility to steward the land and creatures. Genesis 1 should not be read outside of what we have in Genesis 9. God loves the creatures and earth as much as God loves us. When we respect creatures and the earth, we are respecting that which God loves. If our value systems permit us to disrespect and deface something which God loves, we have a theological and moral problem and environmental problem on our hands. Our time together reading scripture and telling stories, ideally, help us come to love that which God loves and nurture it.

A story which reflects this comes from my butcher and producer of lentils: Don and Louella Friesen. Following this up will be a few words from Jared Regier.

Slide: Don and Lou—Farm, Family, Quality

¹ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013), pp 126-127.

² [Dodo | Bird, History, & Facts | Britannica](#)

The journey of healing the land began in the late 80's with our decision to move to organic farming from what is often referred to as conventional farming. A more accurate term would be chemical based farming.

At the time, our decision was based on the idea of being good stewards of the land we were entrusted with and providing a healthier food option for consumers. Over the years we have come to realize that chemical based farms believe they are also being good stewards of the land and the food they grow.

Our transition to organic farming was, and continues to be a learning experience. We always seem to be experimenting with soil building options, intercropping, etc. The choice we made has allowed us to farm and feel good about it. For us it was the right choice.

Another aspect of the healing was the relationship with our neighbours. In some cases it took years for some to understand what we were trying to do and for them to realize it was a viable option. Some just couldn't handle seeing the weeds. I think in most cases there is a mutual respect for the different farming methods used, and that they can exist next to each other.

Our connection to the land is a Holy experience. The soil is alive and gives us life. If one realizes all the tiny eco systems beneath our feet as we walk the fields and how every system is connected to the next, it is mind blowing and miraculous. We are fortunate and grateful that some of our land remains in its natural state of sloughs, ponds and bushes and we enjoy that daily all year round. Listening to the birds and frogs and crickets brings healing to the mind. We believe everything is connected and the land is also blessed when it hears what is going on above and below. Over the years we have planted shelter belts that provide save habitat for birds and other wild life.

Our farm is located on Treaty 6 territory and it has only been in the last number of years that we have recognized this. This realization doesn't undo what's been done but we believe in a sense it is calling the land to heal. How can we continue to move towards healing with the indigenous community? One does not need to look far to see what that part of our history has done to the indigenous people.

How does the healing continue?

Plant trees, grow our own food, educate ourselves to get a better understanding of our history, volunteer at food banks, build relationships.

Don & Louella Friesen

Slide: Chain Reaction (vegetables)

Jared Regier, our next contributor, echoes some of the themes already mentioned and concludes his thoughts, and my sermon, with action steps.

Naturally, each person could find different ways to contribute to the healing of the Earth, but if we had to distill all of those individual acts of healing down to their common starting points, I believe they would connect to these two fundamental truths.

Truth A: Humans can only love what they know

A few weeks ago, Jane and Arla were staging a toddler protest as our family was getting ready to leave church. Ernie wandered up to me and asked, “So how do you get your children to like church so much that they don’t want to leave?” I replied simply, “We just bring them here every week.” Now, there is obviously a bit more to it than that, but not much really. Love can’t grow without familiarity, and we all find ways to love the people, places, and things that we know the best.

My love of nature started in my toddler years too. I was lucky to grow up with parents that took our family on numerous camping and hiking trips each summer. Sure, there were bugs and cold nights, but overall, those experiences allowed me to fall in love with the sights, sounds, and smells of the forests, lakes, and mountains across our beautiful country, at least as much as any city raised boy could. That’s a love that might never have grown in me had I not enjoyed those early experiences in nature, because it’s only possible for me to love what I know.

Truth B

Humans will only protect what they love. My early love of nature was probably the main reason I was impacted so much by one of my summer jobs during university. The job was tree planting. You live in the forest with a crew of planters, wake up at dawn, plant tiny trees all day, eat a giant supper, stagger into your tent to fall asleep, and repeat again the next day. For a hard worker, it was a good way to make a lot of money, but it also exposed me to the impacts of logging firsthand. Every day we would maneuver our bodies and planting bags through endless acres of slash where forests had once stood. Forestry products were everywhere in my world back home and of course I knew that all the paper and wood had come from trees, but something was different about seeing the forests that were now missing because of these products. I was further impacted by how discretely the forests were being removed. I saw thousands of acres of clear-cut land in my years as a tree planter, but not one of those acres was within view of a town, a campground, or even a public highway. I wonder how different our conservation efforts would be if logging companies were forced to first extract the forests that were visible to us all. I suspect that might change the false sense of confidence we have in the not-so-endless natural resources of our planet. (For more insight into the hidden impacts of our everyday life, watch the documentary “Manufactured Landscapes” which showcases the landscape photography of Edward Burtynsky).

[I]f humans will only protect what they love, and only love what they know, then the first step of healing the Earth is to help humans know the Earth. If no one actually knows the Earth, we can’t expect anyone to care about its healing.

Action Steps

In our global economy and screen tethered world today, I admit it can be a challenge to connect with the natural systems that support our lives everyday, so here are a few simple steps that can help with this process. I beg you to follow these steps in order with as much urgency and gusto as you can muster. Don’t do it for me, or even for yourself. Do it for

our children and all the generations that follow. With the knowledge we have of our environmental impact today, it is unethical to do anything less.

- i) Go outside more, and find a way to do it in places where your view of the sky isn't blocked by buildings and your feet aren't guided by the pavement. Remind yourself that you're a tiny spec in an amazing natural system that supports your life every day.
- ii) Meet your needs in life with material goods and services available in your own ecoregion. This step alone won't solve all of our problems immediately, but this makes it much more likely that you will be aware of the true cost of your goods and services. If I buy imported food or clothing, I am oblivious to the destruction caused by unsustainable farming practices or textile mills, but if these goods were produced in my own backyard, sooner or later, any potential problems are going to impact me and I'm going to do something about it.
- iii) Erase your ecological footprint and maximize your social impact. What will be left on Earth when your life here comes to a close? Most of us are leaving behind a pretty big pile of garbage, yet the animals around us are evidence that life can come and go and leave a natural system perfectly intact throughout the process. God's creation is a textbook of limits, interconnectivity, and diversity that we have to learn from as we attempt to tread more lightly. How can you live your life here and still leave this planet better off than when you arrived?

I am grateful for the authors who have guided this sermon for today: Jared, Lou & Don, Robin Wall Kimmerer, the biblical scriptures, encouraging friends and ultimately the Great Spirit in whom we live, move and have our being. Amen.

Patrick Preheim, co-pastor Nutana Park Mennonite Church

Slide: Journey Towards Healing image