

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Pentecost 18
September 23, 2018
Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz
What a wonderful world!
—Genesis 1:26-31

“God saw all he had made, and it was very good.” Those words sum up God’s creative work at the end of six days. Everything was complete. Everything was just as God wanted it. The whole creation was perfect. I don’t know if we can even imagine the perfect world that God saw when he admired his handiwork because things have gone so far downhill since then. But even today in its fallen, sinful, decayed, deteriorated state this creation, this world, this planet, this galaxy, this universe, is filled with so much beauty. Living in Arizona and in the United States of America we enjoy some of the most scenic and diverse landscapes anywhere on earth: spectacular sunsets, clear blue skies, mountain lakes and flowing rivers, lush meadows, wide-open deserts, gorgeous canyons, magnificent mountains. All we have to do is look around at creation and marvel: What a wonderful world!

It’s a wonderful world because God is our wonderful God. The Bible doesn’t even try to prove that God is the Creator. That point should be so obvious to any reasonable person that it can simply be assumed. Yet there are many voices today claiming that science has disproved creation and proven evolution. This is simply not true; there is no way to apply the scientific method to the origin of the universe. It’s not science; it’s a belief system. Mathematically evolution is well outside the range of statistical possibility. Logically the theory is implausible and full of logical fallacies. Today’s human theories on origins are fine examples of how the blindness of unbelief will cause people to hold fervently and fiercely and religiously to notions that are neither scientific nor mathematical nor logical—simply because they do not want to be accountable to their Creator. And that’s so sad, because denying the Creator means denying his love

We know there is a God because of what he has made. Looking at the beauty, the order, the complexity of nature informs us that God is kind, wise, just, powerful, and loving. But looking at creation doesn’t tell us who God is, and it doesn’t tell us anything about what the true and living God has done to save us. For that we need God to reveal himself to us personally and specifically. That’s why we need the Bible to know God our Savior. The Bible tells us how God revealed himself to people like Abraham, Moses and the prophets. At Mount Sinai millions of people saw the glory of the LORD on display and heard God speak. Finally God made himself known by coming in human flesh. God’s name is Jesus, Savior. God walked among us, healed the sick, commanded the forces of nature, even raised the dead to identify himself as the eternal God in the flesh. And Jesus himself was raised from the dead to verify his identity as the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

So because of the testimony of Scripture handed down through us unchanged through the millennia, we not only know that there is a God, we know what he has done to forgive and save us and restore our relationship with him that was broken by sin.

But today we’re finishing up our three-week stewardship series, and we want to learn about how we as God’s people can care for God’s creation. The fact that God is the Creator is critical to understanding where we fit and what our role is. God made it; he owns it. “The earth is the LORD’s and everything in it, the world and all who live in it” (Psalm 24:1). God created human beings in his image in his likeness. That means that unlike the beasts and the birds and the other creatures we human beings are *moral creatures* made in the image of God. We can discern right and wrong, morality and immorality. We can think about eternal things. We have a conscience. We have a soul. We can know the mind of God, how he thinks, what he wants. We were created to commune with God, to live in harmony with God. After God had created male and female in his holy image he gave them the responsibility to care for his creation, to fill the earth and subdue it, to exercise careful dominion over God’s creation as stewards of God’s creation, and to glorify God as God’s caretakers of the earth.

I’m sure many of you have rented a car at some point. Maybe on vacation or for a business trip or while your own car was in the shop. Sometimes the car you rent is nicer and newer than the car that sits in our own garage. It doesn’t happen to me often, but it has happened at least twice that they handed me the keys to the rental car, and it was a brand spanking new car with all the latest and greatest features and a total of four miles on the odometer. Sweet! When you rent a car (or even borrow a friend’s car) you are acutely aware of the fact that the car belongs to someone else. As long as it’s in your hands you’re responsible to take care of it, but it’s not yours. Now, we could take the attitude that says, “It’s a rental!” And sometimes we do. The car gets scratched by a shopping cart or dinged by a door, but “It’s a rental!” You could take the car off the pavement and go bouncing around off-road and abuse the suspension, but hey, “It’s a rental!” You could drive through a thicket of mesquite or catclaw and paint the sides with all kinds of Arizona pinstriping, but hey, “It’s a rental!” Or we could be especially appreciative

of a nicer, newer car, respect the fact that it's someone else's property, and take extra special care of it while we're using it.

That's kind of how we might view creation: use it, abuse it, because we're just passing through. Or respect it and care for it. Sadly, our disobedience has broken our relationship with God and our relationship with the created world around us. Instead of subduing the creation and using the bounty of the earth for God-pleasing purposes, we have raped the earth. Instead of caring for creation, the human race has abused it and polluted it. There's a lot of discussion these days about who is responsible for climate change (is it coming from natural causes, or is it because of human beings), but it is perfectly true that the sad, fallen, decaying state of today's world with all its natural disasters, devastating hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, plagues, diseases, and even deadly asteroids is a direct result of mankind's sin and rebellion against God. God didn't create death in the world; that came from man's disobedience. This world wasn't created to decay and deteriorate; the decline of God's creation is a direct result of human rebellion, and it's just a sneak-peak preview of the final destruction of this creation by fire at the end of the world when Jesus comes again.

But you and I have been renewed in the image of our Creator. Through the redeeming work of Jesus, with his blood shed for us on the cross and his Easter victory over death, our relationship with God has been restored to perfection. You are a new creation, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. We are Christians, followers of Jesus. As Christians we understand our sacred responsibility to care for what is God's. Christians have the highest motivation to care for the environment: we are caretakers of what is God's. We can have the greatest appreciation for clean air and clean water, renewable energy, sustainable harvests, because these are blessings and gifts from God, not things to be taken for granted or wasted, but things to be cherished and to praise our Father in heaven for.

God created human beings in his image, in his likeness, and the day is coming when we will meet our Maker. As the master in Jesus' parables called the stewards to account for their management of the things entrusted to them, the Lord God our Maker will call us to give an account for our lives. That's a sobering thought! The God who has all power to create and all power to save also has all power to destroy. So for us Christians each day is a day of repentance, a day to recognize our own sinfulness, to confess and to repent of our sins against the Lord our Creator, and each day is a day to turn to Jesus in repentance and faith for the forgiveness of our sins. And forgive us God does! For the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of our Savior Jesus Christ, God has had mercy on us his fallen creatures. He has forgiven us our sins, and he gives us his Spirit to strengthen and empower us to honor him with our stewardship of his creation.

This world, as beautiful and wonderful as it is, is still corrupt and must come to an end. But God has something better planned for his people. Jesus says in the Revelation of St. John, "I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:5). The last book of the Bible revisits creation from the first book of the Bible. This old heaven and earth must pass away, but the same God who called light from darkness and made everything out of nothing will create a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. And if you enjoy the beauty of this world, wait until you see paradise! Wait until you see what God is preparing for you, his chosen, forgiven people! Imagine a world without sin, without pain, sorrow or death. Imagine a world that does not decay, that never wears out. Imagine your own body, a new glorified gift of God, that never gets hurt, never gets sick, never grows old, never declines, never dies. It boggles the mind and staggers the imagination to think of the wonderful world that is waiting for us in the resurrection when we will be with the Lord forever!

Meanwhile, we're still in this world, where the beauty we see and the wonders we experience are just a glimpse of even more wonderful things to come. I pray that when you get out to enjoy God's creation you still marvel at God's love and wisdom in creating this beautiful playground for you to enjoy. Enjoy it, cherish it, take care of it! Be a steward of the things that belong to God. And let a gorgeous landscape, a stunning sunset, a beautiful nighttime sky filled with stars be reminders of the powerful majesty of God and the privilege you have of being a son or daughter of the Almighty, through faith in Jesus. Amen.