

Things We Absolutely Must Conserve

(An Earth Day Sunday message)

Genesis 1:20-22, Proverbs 30: 24-28, Job 12:7-10 Matthew 6:25-29

In my old age, I've begun reading children's books!

And one of my absolutely favorite places to go to read children's books is READING REPTILE, the children's bookstore in Brookside. Lately, I've been going to READING REPTILE to browse for books for the next 16 week episode of Peace Quest. The next Peace Quest—***We Dream a World***: *Earth keepers and Sky Lovers! Peacekeepers and Forest Conservers! Music Makers and Mountain Lovers! Storytellers and Dream keepers! River followers and Rock Readers!*—will begin in late September.

So far I have found these books:

Welcome to the Ice House

Welcome to the Green House

The Same Sun Was in the Sky

Why War Is Never a Good Idea (read first page: "Though war speaks in many languages, it never knows what to say to frogs!")

The Polar Bear Son—an Inuit Tale

The Amazon River

A Small Tall Tale from the Far Far North—an Arctic Peoples Legend

Wonders of the Natural World.....AND

All Around Me I See (Read a Little):

"A leaf is a boat for a beetle.
A rock is an island for a frog.
A turtle makes a bridge from a log.
A branch is an owl's point of view.
A forest is a family for a tree.
The earth is a home for you and for me."

More and more, I believe in conserving!

I especially believe in conserving and preserving habitats!

More and more often I see habitats that we absolutely must conserve!

The Brazilian priest and theologian Leonardo Boff has written that the challenge we face in the 21st century is not to change the world but to conserve the world!

Not to transform the world through technology, industry and know how as we have for the past five hundred years!

But instead we must learn to conserve the world so that we and other forms of life may yet flourish in the world five hundred years from now!

But what does this mean, to conserve our world?

What are the things we absolutely must focus our attention and efforts on conserving?

- **One of the most important and vital things that cries out for conserving in today's world is what I call spiritual habitats.....What are spiritual habitats!**

Spiritual habitats are places where the soul is sustained!

Spiritual habitats are places and times where the soul is enlarged and deepened!

Spiritual habitats are “thin places” where the soul thrives.

Spiritual habitats are sacred spaces and sacred times where the human being learns to forgive!—

To show mercy!

To extend kindness!

To recognize the evidence of God's grace!

Spiritual habitats are found where self giving love is practiced—and where self sacrificing love is dared.

A spiritual habitat is a realm where our fears and our worries and our anxieties can say their prayers—and courage from them grows larger!

Spiritual habitats are places where God is loved, where God is adored and where the art of worship is faithfully practiced.

This church, our congregation, is just such a spiritual habitat!

And it cries out for conservation here in the 21st century.

Coming here from the streets of Kansas City and its surrounding suburbs, you can find a spiritual refuge inside this spiritual habitat!

Like the raccoons that disappear over and beyond our roof to a place we can never seem to find, you can disappear into **this** realm and find the art of worship, spiritual learning and illuminated Christian action being practiced and explored in a way you will not find in many other places.

Like a low flying heron disappearing around the bend in the Blue River, you can disappear from your daily life, come in here, hear great choral music, practice hymn singing, listen to soul thrilling music such as we heard here on Friday from Ron Brown and Marian Thomas, be awed again by the spiritual insights of a play like *Our Town* as our Cinema and Soul crowd was last Sunday night—and rest your soul in Christian rituals and symbols that have been conserved faithfully enough to create space for a kind of creativity and change that encourages our imaginations to soar.

Just as certain animals and trees and flowers require a warm and wet ancient forest in which to survive and thrive—OR just as certain species require Ice, snow pack and constantly below freezing temperatures—and really we all need those habitats wherever on the planet we live—in like manner, *10 years of Teaching Children Peace* needs a special, spiritual habitat! Brown Bag Concerts such as *One Piano! Four Hands* or Robert Hughes’ and Marians’ *African American Spirituals* need a special spiritual habitat!

A Live Staged Reading of a Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol!* Meals on Wheels! An Authentic Passover Seder! Boy Scout Troop 60! Cinema & Soul, Alice Parker’s *Sermon from the Mountain*, initiatives like Westport Center for the Arts & the *Our Schools: Learning or Retrenchment?* workshops require a special spiritual habitat in which to survive and be sustained. You are not going to find in many other places, if any, such a spiritual habitat where these kinds of ministries can thrive.

- **Along with conserving spiritual habitats such as ours, we also need to re-dedicate ourselves to conserving the ancient wisdom and the ancient stories of our ancestors.** The wisdom that you listened to this morning from the Book of Proverbs, the sayings of Jesus, the Book of Genesis—is wisdom that tells us who we are, how we got here, where we are going, who and what is on the journey with us, when and where we can find God along the way.

It may not change my life or your life one iota to realize that in the Creation Story it says over and over again, “and it was evening and it was morning, the first day...and it was evening and it was morning, the second day...and so on. But knowing that the ancient peoples for whom that text was first sacred, used the moon to create a calendar

and so started their “day” at night when they could see what phase the moon was in—knowing that, I believe, will alter your inner compass and your inner life in a mysterious, barely detectable way.

Or reading in *The Proverbs* of the ways of the animal kingdom or praying Jesus’ teachings, of the ways of birds and flowers—that kind of wisdom, prayed and meditated on, eventually has to make a difference in how you look at this world and live your life.

Last week, the *Kansas City Star* newspaper reported on a box turtle that is now 75 years old. Given the name Wilma by her owner in the 1930’s, this little turtle lived in a home for 60 years, was then donated to the nature center in Swope Park in 1993, and now happily lives off the crickets the nature center staff feed it.

It is time to stop trying to change the world for our own benefit, and start working to conserve the world for its benefit. We live in a new age. The world is not an object for us to shape and bend to our own ends. Instead the world is a subject to be engaged, to be loved, to be cared for, to be in wonder of, to be in awe of for its own sake, and ultimately for our sake as well!

When Dennis Yerry, the Haudanosaunee—Iroquois musician and story teller and wisdom keeper—was here, he talked about his fore bearers’ wisdom in looking at any important decision from the viewpoint of how it would affect 7 generations following. Seven generations after us!

If we started thinking even partially in that way, we would see how self centered and self absorbed we are in having to have this resource or that resource now—for ourselves! Not even for our children or grandchildren, but now and for us— as though we were the most important people who have ever lived and the most important beings that ever will live!

Lately, I have been trying to think through in my own mind what made Jesus the Son of God. I have concluded that it must have been his relationship with God. I think Jesus must have lived every day, every hour, as intensely as is humanly possible in an I-Thou relationship with God, with his fellow humans and with the natural world. In other words Jesus was immediately present to whomever and whatever he encountered as he went about his day—whether it was a rich young ruler, some poor fishermen on the Sea of Galilee, a donkey, a fig tree, some lilies he saw by the side of the road, some birds

he glimpsed flying through the air, a grateful leper over here, a tax collector over there, a storm on the sea, a lonely woman at a well, an enemy across the table, the personal presence of evil, the goodness of a war widow with children—whomever! Whatever! His attention, his focus, his love was focused on them, not himself—and through them—on God! That’s what made him the Son of God. No one else has ever been able to manage that kind of life with The One Who is Everywhere!

In the end, the reason I am a committed Christian today is that in the 2,000 year old story of Jesus Christ—an ancient story with ancient truth and ancient wisdom—there is revealed the key to the saving of the human race and of all of life through the cross of Jesus Christ—which is to say, through the principle of self giving, self emptying and self sacrificing love that forgives sins, confronts enemies with love instead of hate, is willing to die to self for the sake of the other—whether that other is another human being or another species or a forest or the sky or another group of human beings.

We cannot tell the story of Jesus Christ enough, because in his compassionate life and through his passionate death are the key to opening the door through which the world and its future may be conserved.

*A leaf is a boat for a beetle.
 A rock is an island for a frog.
 A turtle makes a bridge from a log.
 A branch is an owl’s point of view.
 A forest is a family for a tree.
 The earth is a home for you and for me!*

Amen.

Rev. Scott Myers, Pastor, Westport Presbyterian Church
 April 22, 2008

Some of you have asked me, in regards to some of the Peace Quest questions that are on the walls in the Fellowship Room, "What animal did the woman who fell from the sky land on?" Well, now you know, "It was a turtle." Now we know that the world was not created by a woman falling from the sky onto the back of a turtle. Yet I wonder whether the turtle, carrying its home around on its back, shouldn't leave us with a sense of wonder. I wonder whether the turtle, living now in the water and now on the land, at home in both and living even beyond the lifespan of most humans, shouldn't leave us with a sense of wonder. And maybe life does come from the sky, where the air and the rain are and where the sun, from which comes all energy, always shines. I wonder too if it is a coincidence that in Genesis, which means "Origins", the very first creative acts of God have to do with the "Light" which is the sun and the "Dome" which is the sky. Maybe these ancient stories, maybe these ancient mysteries do tell us what we really need to know about our world and how to conserve our world; and that we need to pay attention to them.

I brought along a couple of books with me today. They are two books from the great Story of Civilization by the inimitable Will and Ariel Durant. I have read from the lengthy series, and have used it as a resource and referred to it often over the years, without ever reading it in its entirety. The two books I have here are entitled "The Age of Faith" and "The Age of Reason". The Age of Faith was the Middle Ages. It ended sometime in the 1400's. The Age of Reason, whose first stage is known as The Renaissance, began sometime in the 1400's.

I believe we are at such a crossroads in the history of humankind today. The Age of Reason is ending. A new age is beginning. How do we know this? In the Age of Reason, everything that exists in the world is an object to be studied, examined, understood, taken apart, put back together, defined, categorized and put to use for man's welfare, profit, enjoyment and material progress and well being. It has been an important and dazzling and necessary age. But we have reached our limit now. We are punching holes in the sky. We are creating new mass extinctions of animals. We are melting ice that took thousands of years to form, and we have created a situation where one person willing to kill him or herself has the potential of destroying a whole city with millions of people in it with a single weapon.

Finally, it is vitally important, in a quest to conserve our world, to conserve

the story, the meaning, and the mystery of the life and the death of Jesus Christ. We need to re-learn the story of Jesus Christ. In the words of the scholar and writer Marcus Borg, we need to meet Jesus Christ again for the first time. Why?

There are two reasons. First, in the 2,000 year old story of Jesus Christ, which makes it an ancient story, an ancient story with ancient truth and ancient wisdom, there is revealed the key to the saving of the human race and of all of life through the cross of Jesus Christ—which is to say, through the principle of self giving, self emptying and self sacrificing love that forgives sins, confronts enemies with love instead of hate, is willing to die to self for the sake of the other—whether that other is another human being or another species or a forest or the sky or another group of human beings. We cannot tell the story of Jesus Christ enough, because in his compassionate life and through his passionate death are the key to opening the door through which the world and its future may be conserved.

Secondly, we ought to tell and re-tell and conserve the story of Jesus Christ because of what it tells us about the life eternal. It—he—tells us that life is eternal. The message of Easter is that life is eternal. Life does not end with death. Death is a season of life. And life goes on. How and in what form, we do not know, any more than the caterpillar can imagine the butterfly or the acorn the oak tree. But the soul's life continues and we reap what we sow in this life and in the next life, on earth as it is in heaven. To conserve our world, we need to conserve the mystery of Easter, the idea that life is eternal, the idea that goodness is stronger than evil, that life is stronger than death, love stronger than hate or fear, that my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.

I would like to conclude today by taking you back to the beginning of this message. I would like to show you again that little deer racing into the woods, vanishing into the undergrowth. You could go after him. You could plunge into the trees where you last saw him. But you would never catch him and you would never even see him again. He would just go further and further. He has a refuge in which to hide. He has a habitat in which to live and be safe and thrive.

You too have such a refuge. It is as complex and as lively and as mysterious as the realm into which that deer has escaped. It is peopled with stories and rituals and creative traditions and unmappable moments which occasionally provide an inkling of a larger grace and a deeper understanding that only God can disclose. It is, for you and for me, God's Conservation Plan. May you make it your plan. May we all make it our plan. Amen.

**Reverend Scott Myers
Church**

October 9, 2005

Westport Presbyterian