First United Methodist Church

Springboro, Ohio

Rev. Dr. Suzanne Allen

August 23, 2015

Series: Restoration In Progress

Message: “Restoring the Earth”

Scripture: Matthew 8:23-27

Earlier this month we had the joy of spending some family time at the beach. There is something about the water, sand, and sun that soothes the soul. It’s hard to sit on the beach, especially early in the morning and as the sun is setting, and not be at peace.

It’s not just the ocean. Maybe you’re not a beach person, but you might name another place with water—the lake, a mountain stream, a waterfall, as a place where you find peace.

Studies have shown that any time we spend in nature is good for us. Sitting at the beach or walking in the woods, hearing the birds and the crickets, soaking up the sunlight and moonlight, are good for our health, mental, physical and spiritual.

In fact, as we talk about God’s power to restore, we understand that God uses the natural world as a part of that restoration. The natural world is God’s gift to us. Just as any good parent provides a healthy environment for their child to grow and thrive in, God provides a beautiful earth full of majesty and diversity for us to grow and thrive in. And there’s always something moving and changing that keeps our interest with the weather and the seasons and the animals and plants.

Just as a good parent expects their child to enjoy the environment they provide, they also expect them to take care of it…to pick up after themselves and not waste what they have.

And God has that same expectation for us. In Genesis 2:15 we find that even as God creates and gives humankind the privilege of enjoying creation, God also gives us the responsibility of helping to take care of it.

Our United Methodist Social Principles say this about creation care: “All creation is the Lord’s and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it.”

This topic has gotten a lot of media attention since Pope Francis made a recent bold statement about tending to the earth as God’s creation. His basic theology, around caring for the environment as God’s creation, is very similar to our social principles. He put it this way: “Creation is not a property, which we can rule over at will; or even less, is the property of only a few: creation is a gift, it is a wonderful gift that God has given us, so we care for it and we use it for the benefit of all, always with great respect and gratitude.”

As much as we enjoyed our time at the beach, especially our early morning and sunset walks, it was always distressing to notice after all the people cleared out and the beach set-ups were taken down, how much trash was left behind. So much that we have gotten in the habit of taking a trash bag with us. Over the course of the week we find several sets of sand toys, more than a few broken beach chairs, abandoned boogie boards and floaty toys, dozens of plastic bottles, and at least a hundred plastic bottle caps.

All of this on a fairly clean, treasured strip of beach. And then we hear about islands of trash floating in the ocean, oil spills and pollutants harming marine life, temperatures and weather patterns changing, the list goes on…It’s a reminder that this gift of creation that God uses to help restore us also needs to be restored. It’s a reminder that even as God is restoring us, God is calling us to be a part of His restoration of all of creation.

I like the way that Pope Francis puts it. As he describes Christian conversion, he includes a component connected to the care of the earth. He says, “the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ becomes evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocations to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.”

During this series on restoration this summer, we have been using video clips from the show ‘Rehab Addict’ to help us think about and visualize God’s power to restore us.

So this week as we think about creation, how it restores us and how we can help to restore it, we’re going to look at a clip about the importance of landscaping and the difference it makes and then think about what it can teach us about how we care for God’s earth.

Video

So the first thing we find in this clip is that as much as Nicole is raring to go to rehab the house itself, she admits to dragging her feet on landscaping. But, she admits, what is there needs to be changed. It was good at one point. But it wasn’t taken care of, pruned, and now has too many dead spots to be kept.

Thinking about environmental issues is often life this. We’d rather focus on other things. What worked at one point in the past, no longer works in a global economy. We didn’t know about certain things back then. But now we do. Those ways are overgrown, outdated, not healthy any more.

And so we need to rehab the environment too. But change is hard, and expensive. We’d rather pay for updates in technology, for new medicines to fight cancer.

But to put money into the environment? Sometimes we get a little cheap. We’re not sure about the value for money. We know there are politics and hard changes that have to be made that will impact farmers and workers and we don’t want to hurt them.

But then we remember that the health of the environment and our physical and mental and spiritual health are closely interconnected. We remember that a house that is well landscaped has a significantly higher resale value and adds beauty and health to the neighborhood.

In the end, not changing, not rehabbing the environment around a house or not caring for God’s creation is more costly.

So this week’s challenge for us as we are being restored by God’s grace and love is to commit ourselves to work with God to restore the earth, trusting that it is God’s gift to us and is part of restoring us, and so there is a synergy that happens, that increases the power of God’s restoration within us and the world when we partner with God to restore creation.

So I want to encourage you to take these simple practices part of living out your faith. First, to simply appreciate God’s creation, to get out and enjoy it and let it restore your soul. Second, to remember your R’s, which are about doing more with less: reduce what you buy and what you throw away. Borrow and share things. Pass then on when you’re done. But things that will last rather than to throw away. Recycle or compost what can’t be used anymore. Combine trips. Consider the chemicals that you’re using on your lawn and in your home.

And then invest in the environment around you. Make sure that you are cleaning up and taking care of the area that God’s entrusted to you and that you’re not wasting it.

May we enjoy and care for and restore the creation with great respect and gratitude.