

Lenten Eco-Justice
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Soon after accepting the assignment of delivering tonight's brief devotion I headed straight to the eco-Christian websites that Mike had sent me to help prepare. Tonight's "theme" is creation so to get my thoughts moving in the right direction, I reread the creation story, flipped through the Psalms, and consulted the texts of numerous "experts" in the field of eco-theology. In my attempt to reacquaint myself with the connections between theology and ecology, I realized that despite my ongoing efforts through Eco Stewards to incorporate environmental issues into Luther Place's worship, conversations, and activities, I am much more comfortable talking about the environment than I am about theology.

While the biblical argument behind caring for and protecting God's creation is a strong and important one to make, I think there is an even greater argument to be made for why Christians should care about the environment—it's social justice.

Part of what draws me to a church community is the very obvious desire of that community and the individuals within it to make the world a better place. Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson has noted that "organized religion is more concerned with the welfare of the group and with the collective good than any other institution." I grew up in a strong Lutheran home in which theology and the Bible were not often discussed with me. Instead, conversations about church generally dealt with what the church was *doing* and who it was serving. The latest Habitat for Humanity build, the new after school program for teenagers, or the homeless man my stepfather took to lunch that day. This, for me, became the model of what church was about. From these conversations grew my understanding of Christianity and what Jesus' message was really emphasizing: love, justice, peace, and care for humanity.

Luther Place, more than any other church I have attended, lives and breathes the mission of social justice. And despite what you may see on TV or read about in the newspaper, protecting the environment is ALL ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE. I can't think of a single problem that more greatly affects people's health and overall livelihood than a degraded environment. As of 2002, some 1.1 billion people worldwide lacked access to safe drinking water. And despite gains in air pollution laws, Washington DC has both the highest child poverty and child asthma rates in the nation according to the American Lung Association. For me personally and I also think for Luther Place, environmental issues must be examined through the lens of environmental or eco justice.

Harvard's Forum on Religion and Ecology explains that: "Ecojustice...offers a dynamic framework for thought and action that fosters ecological integrity with socioeconomic justice through constructive human responses serving both environmental health and social equity. In this spiritually-grounded moral posture, all beings on earth make up one household which benefits from an economy that takes ecological and social stewardship seriously. The four basic norms of ecojustice ethics include: 1) solidarity with other people and creatures in the earth community, reflecting a deep respect for creation; 2) ecological sustainability—environmentally fitting habits of living and working that enable life to flourish and utilizes ecologically and socially appropriate technology; 3) sufficiency as a standard of organized sharing, requiring basic floors and definite ceilings for equitable or "fair" consumption; and 4) socially-just participation in decisions about how to obtain sustenance and to manage community life for the good of the commons."

Admittedly jargon-filled, this list can be quickly simplified.

- 1) Respect all of creation—people and nature
- 2) Make sure everyone has enough of what they need—not want
- 3) Reduce your resource use and thus your impact on the planet
- 4) Give everyone a voice in the conversation

A common criticism of the environmental movement is that it is a white, elitist movement—thus violating the fourth item on the list—inclusion. While this is a problem for other obvious reasons, it is especially troubling because around the world, the poor and disadvantaged

are by far the most affected by polluted air and water, an unhealthy agricultural system, dwindling natural resources, and more and more the effects of global warming.

To use the issue of food as an example, this morning I read an interview with Amie Breeze Harper, who is working on a project called Vegan Sistahs that explores the links between race, food, health, culture, and body image. She emphasized that, "If somehow people could see that it is all connected; that the movement in the black community for racial and class liberation is not disconnected from the environmental sustainability. Think of all the toxic waste coming out of the agribusiness industry. Where does it end up? It doesn't end up in the backyard of Beverly Hills, but where there are working class people of color. If we dig to make those connections, we realize eating animals does affect me as a poor person of color. A lot of waste is going into my backyard and causing my community lots of health disparities and suffering."

Lent is a time of reflection when we often give something up in an effort to put more focus on God and our relationship with him. It's my hope that this Lenten season, we will not only reflect on our relationship with God but also on our relationship with the earth and how that relationship affects all of God's children.