

First Trinity Lutheran Church  
Washington DC  
February 10, 2013  
Luke 9: 28-36

Good morning. For those of you who don't know me, I'm Chris Orvin, and I'm First Trinity's Minister of Creation Care.

In case you haven't noticed, today is a special Sunday. It's special because it's the last Sunday of the Epiphany season, the festival day of the Transfiguration, and the last Sunday before the season of Lent. On top of all that, it's also the national Preach-In on Global Warming, an annual event hosted by Interfaith Power and Light, which is a non-profit that works with religious communities to address climate change. Our special worship today is joined to thousands of congregations across the country and across religious traditions. Muslim and Christian, Jew and Baha'i, we are all talking about our religious response to climate change.

I mentioned I'm the Minister of Creation Care. Which is a relatively new position in our church. But what is Creation Care? I guess, rather obviously, it's the care of Creation. But what is Creation? Creation is everything. Creation is everything since Genesis 1 when the Spirit moved over the waters and the earth was formless and void. Creation is all this "stuff." The wooden pews you're sitting on, the rare earth metals in your iPhones, the air we're breathing, you and me. In short, everything is Creation.

And that gets me to the main point of my talk today: Creation Care is essential to our participating in God's mission of redemption. Whoa. I can actually hear Pastor Tom's blood pressure rising up here. *"I never should have invited this guy to preach!"* But I'll say it again. Creation Care is essential to our participating in God's mission of redemption. God's central mission is the redemption of us and of Creation. Creation Care is how we respond to that redemption by caring for a redeemed Creation, which includes you and me and everybody else

and the entire world. It's how we care for our neighbor, whether that neighbor is a human being or a plant or the air. We show our love for God by caring for Creation.

Creation is a gift. It's God's gift to us: for our use and for our care. Genesis tells us that God gave human beings "dominion" over the natural world. But what does dominion mean? It comes from the Latin *dominium*, or ownership, mastership, lordship. But what kind of masters will we be? Foolish masters who over-fish and over-fertilize and over-mine and over-eat and over-everything, leaving our children with less than we had? Or wise masters who planned prudently to guarantee a natural bounty for generations yet unborn?

This idea that we are masters of the Earth without restrictions or limitations often comes from thinking that we are somehow *independent* from and *above* Creation. Scripture tells us otherwise. In Genesis God gets down in the muck and makes us out of mud. Creating us out of the created Earth. This week we will be reminded of that when on Ash Wednesday we are told we were formed of the earth and to the earth we will return. And in addition to Scriptures, science tells us we are all connected. What plants and the oceans expel as waste is the precious oxygen we breathe. The carbon dioxide we breathe out as waste is a necessary fuel for those same plants and bacteria. Our bodies are 70% water, and the water which flows through our bodies fell from the clouds and raced through streams. And even the very atoms in our bodies can be traced back to the birth, collapse and explosion of stars. As Carl Sagan said, "We are made of star stuff." What a remarkable truth! So Creation isn't "*beneath*" us - it *is* us!

If we are Creation and everything around us is Creation, then I think I'm justified in saying that Creation Care is essential to our participating in God's mission of redemption. I don't think Creation Care is some side problem or a boutique issue for a concerned few or a distraction

from the main mission of the church. I think Creation Care is found all throughout Scripture, staring up at us in the face, even if we don't see it.

Take today's readings from Luke. Jesus, this man, goes up on a mountain, kneels in prayer with some friends. A completely ordinary experience. And then something *extraordinary* happens. He is transfigured. That's an old word we don't use much, but it comes from "trans" (across) and "figurare" (to shape or form). Jesus was "formed across." Across to what? We aren't told. In that moment perhaps his face became radiant like Moses's did. We are told the disciples were terrified of him in this glowing cloud. Jesus had revealed something to them: perhaps a glimmer of his true power. Speaking with Moses, the pinnacle of the Law, and Elijah, the pinnacle of the Prophecy, he showed his truly divine nature. Which is the Son of God. Which is the great I AM, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.

And then it stops. Jesus is just Jesus again. Boring old Jesus. Their friend. Jesus with his facial hair and toenails, Jesus with his earlobes and belly button. Just like us. Jesus, Joseph's son, the carpenter, who was born in a musty barn, who slept in a feeding trough after his birth among animals and straw and stink. Jesus who ate with them, who laughed with them, who bled on a tree for them. Jesus who died for them.

Our Christian story starts with something entirely ordinary: a birth. A child. A child that came to the earth in the usual way: with pain, with sweat, with blood. And it ends in an entirely ordinary death, our "No" to God's gift of Jesus. A "No" wiped out in the great YES of Easter.

And our whole religion is so laughably, loveably *tactile*! It's here and now. The Gospels aren't about a vague theory, an abstract precept, or an ethereal philosophy. Our Gospels - our Good News - are about water and wine, bread and bones, fish and donkeys, stones and boats, everyday *stuff*. Stuff made out of God's great Creation called in Genesis "very good."

And when God comes into our world, God comes as one of us. Wrapped in the stuff of his own Creation. Wrapped in flesh and bone, blood and hair, spit and tears. God comes to us in Christmas, in the manger, in a form we most intimately know because it is us. It is Creation.

God could have come any other number of ways. God could have descended in a divine ball of radiant light. God could have come as some noble beast, as C.S. Lewis imagines the great Lion Aslan in the *Chronicles of Narnia*. Or he could have come in some alien form we can not even conceive of, some form truly “shaped across.” Something transfigured. But he doesn’t. He comes to us in our image.

We recognize God’s presence in the world in Jesus as a gift. And we respond to it with thanks. In Epiphany, we offer the very best of Creation: we bring him gold, dug from our mountains, and frankincense and myrrh, tapped from our trees. We respond to God’s presence in Creation through this baby child with ... creation! Gold, frankincense, myrrh.

How do we - that is, you and me - respond to this gift of Creation? Do we say “Yes” to that gift? or do we say “No?” We say “No” to Creation when we drive alone instead of carpooling. We say “No” to Creation when we don’t care for our bodies by eating unhealthy food and not exercising. We say “No” to Creation when we don’t recycle or take the elevator instead of the stairs. And we come up with any number of excuses to justify our behavior.

Or do we say Yes? We say “Yes” to Creation when we choose to go “meatless” even for just one day a week or one meal a day. We say “Yes” to Creation when we walk or Metro or bike. We say “Yes” to Creation when we keep our soda can until we find a recycling bin, because we know a single aluminum can recycled saves enough energy to power a TV for three hours. There is a handout at the back of the church that has 10 easy ways you can say “Yes” to Creation at home. In any of the thousands of daily, ordinary choices we make each day we can

say “Yes” to Creation - choices that can have *extraordinary* results which can transfigure the world to something even greater.

We say “Yes” to Creation when we tell our leaders that we know climate change is real and that it’s affecting our world in disastrous ways. Ways that will lead to famines and droughts, and the massive dislocation of people that come from those problems. Tensions will rise as the seas rise: nations will deal with a deluge of displaced people as they deal with a drought from the sky.

Today we can take action. Today we can say “Yes” to Creation. Interfaith Power and Light has a petition you can sign in the back of the church and a postcard (a Valentine) you can send to President Obama telling him you are a person of faith, you care about our warming planet, and you want him to do something. Thousands of houses of worship offering this same, unified message will have an extraordinary effect. All of these entirely ordinary postcards, made of paper and ink, could have an extraordinary impact: they could help save our Creation and save those most affected by our changing climate: poor people in developing countries who suffer disproportionately and unfairly from a problem they did not create.

And we are already taking action. Today’s fellowship hour offers foods that are sourced locally and produced organically as much as possible. Today our children are learning about how we are connected to Creation. And today after church we are showing a video on how important this issue of climate change is for people all around the world.

In the Transfiguration, Jesus’ totally ordinary human body showed forth its totally *extraordinary* divineness. Jesus, formed of Creation, showed us the divine glory of all created things. Of our daily lives. Of our weird and wonderful bodies, of our breakfasts and teas, of our

walks through the snow, of our children playing, and of the natural world we are leaving for them. God in Jesus shows us how good Creation is - good enough to reveal his glory.

When the disciples saw Jesus' radiant glory, they felt two things: sleepiness and terror. And this is a warning to us: to not be so overwhelmed with fear at climate change's challenges that we are paralyzed, and not so detached that we are sleepy and slow to act. Let us go forward hopefully, as resurrected people, knowing that even in our greatest "No" to God in the cross, God still loves us with that divine "Yes" in the empty tomb.

Let us take this seriously. Let us call Creation what it is: holy and a gift. Let us treat that gift with love, with care, and with our fullest attention. So that God's glory can be transfigured in radiant love all around us, through our flesh and blood, through the very mud of Creation.

Amen.