Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, September 20, 2026
"Care for Creation: Life on Land"

The Message

Today is the final Sunday of our sermon series on Care for Creation. We are talking about the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal to protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

And that is a mouthful!

In a nutshell, this goal is trying to protect ecosystems, manage forests, stop land damage, and protect wildlife.

From the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, "preserving diverse forms of life on land requires… efforts to protect, restore, and promote the conservation and sustainable use of terrestrial and other ecosystems."

This sermon series has been admittedly difficult for me to preach, and I'd like to try to tell you why.

I do think these topics are extremely important. And I also think it's OK – in fact, it's good for all of us – to deviate from the usual for a sermon series on occasion.

It's good to hear different voices and perspectives – both for me and for all of you.

But the thing that has been hard about this sermon series is that I feel like no matter how I preach it, it comes off as a lecture about how we aren't doing enough for the environment.

And, it's also hard to bring the sermon around to Good News when, in all honesty, the concerns about our environment are getting more serious every day.

It seems it has accelerated quickly.

So the reality is, we *aren't* doing enough. We probably aren't doing enough personally.

But really, in order for there to be significant and impactful change, it must be done at the highest levels. It must be mandated.

And whenever we are talking about mandates, it brings about concerns from the populous about personal freedom.

But, when given personal freedom, most of us (including myself) are going to choose the most comfortable and convenient options available.

I'll give you an example. When we were under water restrictions, there were things I did to help do my part to conserve water.

When I showered, I would turn the water off when shampooing, conditioning, washing, etc. Essentially any time I wasn't rinsing.

When I washed my hands, I turned the water off while doing the same.

When brushing my teeth, I would only use the water I needed.

But, when the water restrictions lifted, I mostly went back to my usual patterns. I just love a hot shower that isn't interrupted by a shot of cold air when the water is off.

Another example is a little more complex, but, if you bear with me, it gets to heart of the difficulty with this sermon series.

When I am in Canada, I generally feel fine, even good, about the fact that I must bring a reusable bag to the grocery store.

I also feel good about using compostable utensils at restaurants, I love that many restaurants have compostable materials and a place to throw them, and as annoying as paper straws can be, I don't mind using them.

But all of those things that make me feel good only make me feel good because they are the only option I have.

And to be fair, if I could choose between plastic and compostable options, I would generally choose compostable options.

But, if the only choice was plastic? I would not put in the effort to take my own reusable utensils to a restaurant, or my own metal straw, or my own containers for food.

When I travel back home to the United States, I notice a major difference.

And, it makes me incredibly uncomfortable, actually.

There are none of these better choices for the environment there.

Almost all restaurants are still using plastic utensils, none have composting options to throw leftover food or compostable materials, and you can still get plastic bags every time you go to the grocery store.

So my point here is this – I can feel good about the changes that have been made in Canada that are good changes for the environment.

But I also recognize that those changes had to be implemented at a regulatory level. Had they not been, no business and few individuals would be inclined to make any changes to their behaviour.

So, I can preach until I'm blue in the face about the ways in which we can do better personally and as a church, but the impacts we can make on an individual level are miniscule compared to the impact that really needs to be made at a national (arguably, at an international) level.

The problem is not that we are bad people who want to misuse the environment.

And, I don't want this sermon series to come off that way.

The problem is that we are people who are concerned about the environment, we *do* care, and many of us genuinely *want* to do better.

Yet, we live in a culture and a system that is set up in such a way that in order for us to make vast and impactful changes, we must *all* be willing to do so.

Or at least, enough of us must be willing to do so that it *could* make a lasting impact, and we need to drive those changes with consumer choices.

And in order for that to happen, changes must be made at a higher level, and we must be willing to give up "personal freedoms," in some sense of that word, in order to work toward the common good.

Unfortunately, that means trusting our governments to help us, or even force us, to make more environmentally conscious decisions.

Because just like we can see a stark difference between living here and living in the US in terms of how our societies are being more mindful of these things, we can see that the reason for the vast difference is because Canada has made rules at a governmental level.

So, it has been hard for me to stand up here and preach these things to you all.

While yes, there are small changes we can all likely make, the reality is that unless we collectively choose to make large, impactful decisions about the effect we all have on the environment, very little is going to change.

I am really proud of the changes that Canada has made. Yes, some of the things we do here means we have less personal freedom around choosing plastic options or more environmentally conscious options.

But the changes that have been made on a national level *are* impactful, and for those of us who care about these things, we should be proud of that fact.

I can only imagine what a difference it could make if the United States followed suit.

If similar changes could be made in the US, it wouldn't be long before other countries would be doing the same, as much as I don't love that this is the truth of the matter.

But with power comes responsibility, and countries like Canada and the US can be benchmark countries for environmental awareness.

It is a systemic issue, so no matter how much we can do personally, real change must happen at a higher level.

All of that said, I have continued with this series, not so that we all feel like terrible people because we were born into a system of over-consumption.

Rather, I think it is important for us to understand our part in that collective system. It is important for us to understand the system itself if we want to start making change happen.

And, we must be willing to lead the change.

Let's think about Luke 13: 6-9 for a moment because this is a small example of a person who took the initiative to lead change, or at least to try to make a small impact on the environment.

A vineyard owner has a fig tree growing on his land, and he has been waiting for three years for it to bear fruit.

Finally, frustrated with the tree, he orders the tree to be cut down.

But the gardener who oversees the man's vineyard asks if he can have one more season to see if he can help it bear fruit.

He tends to the tree, fertilizes it, and works to change the conditions of the soil so that the tree can grow fruit.

He takes the initiative to foster change and help it grow.

This parable depends on the belief that humanity *can* have a positive impact on the earth and what it produces.

The gardener knew that sometimes, creation needs tending in order to be fruitful.

This parable speaks against a “throwaway culture” – one in which we are willing to easily throw something away if it is no longer useful to us.

In this case, the gardener prevented the tree from being cut down and instead, helped it produce.

In our case, we might think about this in terms of things we throw away that could be recycled, reused, repurposed, or donated so that someone else could find use or value from them.

In what ways could we be more like the gardener? In what ways *can* we make our own impact on the environment?

As much as we are living in a system that is hard to change, there are things that we can do, and the more of us that work together to do these things for the benefit of future generations, the bigger impact we can have on human life as well as the natural world.

Before we close this sermon series today, I want to share one more thing with you.

I talked with Bishop Amy Gohdes-Luhman, who also now works for the Board of World Mission and had a huge part in creating the resource I used for this sermon series.

I asked her if she would create a video for me that concludes this series, and she delivered.

So I’d like to share that video with you now as a conclusion to this series.

I hope you enjoy hearing her input on these topics.

Amy also offers us a closing pastoral prayer at the end of her video.

https://youtu.be/NFQ9SgPgw0k?si=VW09BTMC9QWDNpej