



Grief for Cultural Loss

Stephen Ministry
Pat Bartee - Leader

“Ab, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heaven and the earth by your power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.”

Jer.3:1

“This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards to be faithful.”

I Cor. 4:2

Lessons Learned in Africa

I just recently returned from a trip to Africa where I visited three conservancies and one national reserve, and I witnessed stewardship at its' best and highest level. I visited before the “rainy season” and saw the Kenyan landscape in conditions of extreme drought. I am sharing some ideas I saw there that may help us as we begin to grapple with prolonged drought and water shortages in our country. There are pro-active things we can do.

Know Your Neighbors and Spread the Wealth

Begun probably to deter poaching, the conservancies began to teach their neighbors and meet urgent needs, through agricultural, educational, and health care projects, transportation shuttles, and small business aid for women. The projects have paid off because now the neighbors are invested in the conservancies and want to protect them and their work. In our context: working with those with whom we share water should be seen as superior to fighting with them. Entering projects that harness resources for adjoining states benefits all. Creating lakes and ponds and planting trees in our cities and neighborhoods can beautify and protect.

Dig Deep and Store Up

In the communities outside the conservancy gates, there is evidence of wells and storage tanks, and agricultural patches are protected by fences. Expertise is offered on the choices of vegetables and fruits to grow. In our context: water and long showers are considered luxuries in the wider world. In the U.S., we could help conserve for the future by taking shorter showers, running water only as needed in the sinks, and collecting rainwater for watering lawns. We could plant more native and heat-resistant plants and grass that use less water. We could be compliant with local laws about grease put down our sinks and trash tossed into street drains and work to keep our water clean.

Make the Most of a Good Thing

I was fascinated by a pattern of diagonal grooves in the soil spreading out into the grass on the plains and asked a guide about them. In the rainy season or a sustained rain, the roads tend to pool up and these grooves redirect rainwater out into the grasses where it is needed. It reminds me of the story of the farmer who gave a little of his best seed away to his nearby neighbors each year. When asked why, he answered that when the wind blew, it just blew his own good seed back into his crop and made it richer. In our context: sharing our resources and thinking smarter about what we use and spreading good ideas seems preferable than leaving people struggling.

Be Respectful

All our resources are gifts from God. He asked us to be stewards of them and to use them wisely. Conservancies follow kind and natural policies with their landscape, their water, their neighbors, and their wildlife. In our context: we need to do our own conserving but we need see to the needs of others beyond our boundaries and to help change laws that do not contribute to cleaner water and less greenhouse gas. It will come back to help us.



THE MVPC MEMBERS'

GIFT OF WISDOM

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*“Let us love in truth and action”**
By Applying our Christian Principles
In Changing Times

**1 John 3:18b*

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**Finding our Role in Creation Care:
Presbyterian Hunger Program
Rev. Isaac Toney-Schmitt
Associate Pastor for Faith Formation**

“Enslaving poverty in a world of abundance is an intolerable violation of God’s good creation... A church that is indifferent to poverty, or evades responsibility in economic affairs, or is open to one social class only, or expects gratitude for its beneficence makes a mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship to God.”

(The Confession of 1967, Book of Confessions, 9.46)

We worshipped, Earth-Day-Style, early in April with a focus on water. I mentioned in that worship service that the Mount Vernon campus sits on the dividing line between two watersheds: The Marsh Creek/Chattahoochee on the Mount Vernon side and the Long Island Creek/Chattahoochee on the Johnson Ferry side. Water that lands on our campus will flow two different directions, even if the water lands within a few feet. This is a lovely image to dwell with next time you walk along the turf courtyard; which side will the water flow, from *this* point?

Water was the central theme of the PC(USA)’s Earth Day worship resources in 2018. Each year the theme is updated by the Creation Justice Ministries, a group who creates education and worship materials for many Christian denominations. Since I use this column to share the national PC(USA)’s resources, I’d like to share some of the invitations and prayerful thoughts from this year’s Earth Day theme, “Sowing Seeds – Prophetic Action to Climate-Changed Lands.”

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/aSowing-Seeds-2023-Earth-Day-Sunday.pdf>

The following are blessings pulled from the above link. If these interest you, visit the PC(USA) website to learn more about Presbyterians and Environmental Justice!

Blessing for Farms

The Gift of Seed: God gives us the seed and entrusts it to our care.

Seeds are about the past, the present, and future. A seed is the fruit of a past harvest; they are ready to be planted in the present; in the future, they will bear fruit. May the miracle of life within the seed break forth and yield a bountiful harvest. Lord God, bless the seed, and all who plant it.

The Gift of Soil: God created and entrusted the soil to our care.

The soil is a home for the seed, nourishing and sustaining it. Soil sustains all of life and is a precious resource. Bless the soil, O God, that it may support Your great gift of life. Bless all who work and care for the soil.

The Gift of Water: God blesses us with water and entrusts it to our care.

Water gives sustenance and nourishment to the soil, the seed, and all life, with water in rain, rivers, ponds, lakes, and seas. Creator God, bless the water. Let it come as rain at the right time and the needed amount, so that the seed may flourish and grow, life will be sustained, and the harvest be bountiful.



Gardening Bob Addison

Master Gardener & MVPC Member



When I was growing up, we always had a tomato garden. We also had hot peppers growing in planter boxes on the front porch. I got my love of gardening from Ann (Life Master Gardener) who got her love of gardening from her mother.

What follows is food for thought from the mind of a Master Gardener. That is what the May 2008 certificate from the Dekalb County Extension Service declares. I spent 4 ½ months earning the certificate. I am the tiller, planter, and waterer. Not really a master - just playing in the dirt! When asked to write this article, I thought of the Garden of Eden (**Gen 2:8**) and the Tree of Life (**Rev 22:1-5**) and all the many Bible books in between with examples of food and plants.

I am blown away every time I put a plant or seed in the ground. It is like family and life. You have to prepare the soil, fertilize, pull weeds, mulch, water, and talk to the plants. Yes, you do!

When it comes to seeds being put in the ground, I think of Christ and the tomb. I think gardening puts one in touch with Heaven as much as anything one does. One more thing that is of such a religious nature is Nature itself (and Nature does declare God). In the Fall plants depart and lie dormant in the soil. Then in the Spring up pops the plant through a cleaned flower bed with new pine straw or bark and you watch the plant grow and mature. I just love all the new birth. It’s fun to walk alone with God in the garden and offer praise and glory to God. About this same time in church, we sing ... “Up From the Grave He Arose”.

Right now, nature is singing to us and declaring God to the whole world around us. Over time I have learned that God is the real “Master Gardener”. Not only Eden but the whole globe when you look and think about it. All the different trees and plants for us. Also, the oxygen and carbon dioxide we exchange with the plants. Trees need protection all over the world -- not just the rain forest.

When you think about it, God stocked and supplied the Earth with everything mankind would ever need to exist. We need to be good stewards of all that has been placed in our hands: water, wind, dirt, and fire. Things we take for granted: materials for clothes, the food we eat, what we drink, heat, cooling, medicine, oxygen, and you can add more to this list. We are touched by God’s gardening every day.

Other Thoughts:

Gardening is a time to commune with God. All around us, each and day, Nature is declaring God. Gardening makes us move and bend. Plants bring in the birds, bees, butterflies plus deer and rabbits. Recycle. Conserve. Don’t Destroy. Stop polluting the earth. Replant. Share abundance. My biggest wonder is how a 90 foot tree sends water from the ground to its top and all the branches and leaves in between.

In conclusion, when I think of gardening, I think of the cycle of life: birth, living, death, and being reborn. The soil is so Biblical.

Vital Congregations

Mark 1. Lifelong Discipleship Formation

David Hill, Clerk of Session



One of the marks of a healthy congregation is the degree to which members are engaged in Christian learning. For many years, church members were in Sunday School classes as the primary way of learning. In more recent years Christians engage less in Sunday School and often aren’t involved in any form of Bible Study or other learning opportunities.

What are ways we can learn about God, his kingdom, and what He expects of us? Beyond Sunday School, we can participate in various types of study groups or in individual Bible study. A key to learning, though, is consistency – how often does the study group meet or how often do I read the Bible on my own? For individual study, another key is resources – do I use a study Bible, commentaries, dictionaries? Some scripture is difficult to understand (**Acts 8:29-35**) and the right resources are vital to understanding.

Are Christians required to engage in Christian learning? No, because we are saved by faith (**Eph. 2:8**), not by works. The dilemma we face, however, is if we don’t learn, how will we pass on Christian theology and practices to future generations (**Proverbs 22:6**)? What will we tell our children and our grandchildren about God? How will we engage with others when confronted by questions about our faith if we don’t know the basics about our faith (**Acts 2:42**)?

Consider the following questions as a way of thinking about where you are in your journey as a Christian learner:

- Why are there two creation stories – one in Gen. 1 and another in Gen. 2?
- Why are there so many genealogy lists in the Bible? Are these lists really important?
- What does it mean when we hear that the Bible is the inspired word of God (**2 Tim. 3:16**)?
- Does the Bible really suggest we should use poisonous snakes in worship? Do I have to be baptized?
- What is my role in carrying out the Great Commission (**Matt. 28:19-20**)?
- Why do the gospel stories regarding the resurrection of Jesus conflict with one another? Do these inconsistencies conflict with our understanding of God’s inspiration of Scripture?
- In the book of Job, do God and Satan really bet (**Job 1:6-12**) on whether Job will remain faithful to God? Isn’t betting gambling and would God really gamble?

What will we tell our children and grandchildren when they ask questions about our Christian faith (**Eph. 6:4**)? Our answers will depend upon our learning journey as Christians. And in turn, our learning journey will depend upon how our church finds new and exciting ways of helping members learn about the love of God. We all must commit to Christian learning, not because it is required, but because we love God and love how he loved us first. Let’s make sure Mount Vernon is a Vital Congregation engaged in lifelong discipleship formation!