



4.28.24 Facing Creation's Brokenness | Romans 8:19-25

Last week I shared about how much my dad influenced my love and care for nature. He modeled caring for the earth in many different ways.

I also grew up watching another man on tv, who significantly influenced me around earth care, perhaps influenced my whole generation, maybe influenced you too?

Do you remember this man, Iron Eyes Cody?

He was better known as the "Crying Indian". Remember the commercial he was in?

It was one-minute public service announcement, created by the non-profit Keep American Beautiful organization, started on tv in 1971.

It begins with Iron Eyes paddling his birch bark canoe down a river into a big lake, big city with a ton of pollution. The ad ends with, "**People start pollution. People can stop it.**" Cody then turns to the camera, and then we see a single tear falling from his right eye.

Even then the commercial was a bit problematic perpetuating hurtful stereotypes. And out of respect for our First Nations brothers and sisters, I won't show it here.

All I want to say, is that commercial influenced me in a good way. I didn't want him to cry about pollution. I'll share more about how that commercial motivated me to take action as a water protector at the end of the sermon.

The commercial was troubling to watch. It was troubling to see him cry and see all the garbage in the river and on the shore. It packed a real emotional punch then!

And for us today, it is still troubling to think about pollution, difficult to come face to face with nature's brokenness, what humans have done in hurting the earth.

I'm guessing you have your own watershed moments that have prompted you to care for the earth. Your own experiences that make creation care a topic of real importance to you.

Watching a documentary on the disappearing coral reefs or seeing garbage pile up against a neighbor's fence.

Seeing a beautiful, wooded area plowed down for townhomes?

Maybe you've signed up to clean highway ditches but it was hard to know where to start? Does this guy fishing make you a bit twitchy...how can you fish and just float by that?

We all have our stories of earth's brokenness igniting a need in us to respond.

In summary of our text we have hope, we have longing, identity, and interconnectedness.

We see that the whole earth and every living thing on it, all of creation including humans groan with longing to be free. All of creation is struggling, like in childbirth, eagerly anticipating, meaning hoping for freedom from the bondage of decay.

Everything on some level feels their bondage to decay, facing death. And yet everything also waits expectantly, longing for God's full redemption.

And a hopeful tone..."waits in eager expectation" is not a narrative of despair. The best is yet to come for us and all of creation.

We find that hopeful waiting in verse 19, "**For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.**"

Note our identity our special relationship with God. Seeing ourselves as God's children, dearly loved, we can see our stewardship responsibility flows from relationship steeped in love.

The earth is crying out, longing for us to take life-giving action. And because we know God as Father, it motivates us to honor God. We act because we do not want to see God crying over the earth in all its brokenness.

And then in verse 22, underscored by our 'groaning together' and 'suffering together'. Humans and the earth are interconnected and intertwined, woven together by God's hand.

In *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer, she comments on her cultures practice of braiding and its meaning,

“The braid is an intertwining of science, spirit, and story – old stories and new ones that can be medicine for our broken relationship with earth...healing stories that allow us to imagine a different relationship, in which people and land are good medicine for each other.”

We were always meant to be “good medicine”, reciprocal in our care. Nature sustaining us as we care for the earth.

There is a significant shift in the final two verses. In verses 23 to 25, the author shifts away from seeing the earth as broken to seeing new life and healing in the connection between humanity and creation.

Much of what we hear on the news in relation to environmental concerns can seem hopeless. We have already mentioned “eagerly awaits” as hopeful, but we also note how verse 23 mentions “first fruits” and then the word “patience” is found verse 25.

Ideas that convey change is coming, hoping and waiting for something better are valid when based in faith in God.

We may not “see” hope in some places in the world. But we have the “first fruits” – initial evidence, inklings, experiences of new life from God in little ways. That can sustain us as we work and wait patiently for FULL redemption of the earth.

How do we want to respond to God’s truth today?

I’m a big fan of taking small steps. Did you ever watch the movie What About Bob?

Bill Murray played Bob and he had a lot of hang ups, lots of personal difficulties. Until the day his new therapist suggested he take “baby steps”, to break down his struggles and phobias into smaller steps so he could overcome them.

And in a way that only Bill Murray can do, he took “baby steps” and broke down his fears and found freedom where there had only been struggle.

I see earth care in the same way.

Just like Bob, we need to break our stewardship down into smaller baby steps. We can’t fix everything that is broken. But we can do our part to be faithful to God and care for the earth by taking manageable action.

We can grow in taking small responsible sustainable actions in caring for the earth. And we can be encouraged that those small steps do add up for change.

I've noticed the small steps I have taken over the years, share some. Just to get us thinking about this. As I share, maybe you will find one that you like and add it to your practices. Or share with me what you've done during fellowship.

I am mindful of the amount of water I use...in the morning, doing dishes, or taking a shower.

But I must confess, even though I grew up with this catchy little rhyme from my dad to guide my toilet flushing habits..."**If it is yellow let it mellow, if it's brown flush it down.**" I...ahh...I still flush. There is no mellowing, I still flush.

I recycle my plastic bags almost every Sunday. Put them on Joanne Sykora's chair. Because she brings them to the Buffalo Community Center to be made into plastic mats for the homeless.

Another pitch, please keep bringing in your used plastic bags and plan to attend our Wed, May 8th's Meals and Missions event. At 6:00pm we'll have spaghetti YUM, and join in our earth-honoring activity.

I use my own bags to take home my groceries in and appreciate shopping at Aldi's.

Use biodegradable doggie bags to throw away the treasures my cats leave in the litter box.

Stopped buying laundry detergent in big plastic bottles; replaced with pods and sheets of laundry soap.

Becoming part of Spirituality In Nature Group, advocate together for earth friendly activities.

For us, I know you care about the environment. Partly by how well you care for your church...inside and out. We have a beautiful church! We care about the earth too.

And I am guessing there are probably many of you doing a lot more than anything I just shared. Many of you are informed and taking more and bigger steps.

If you have a heart for earth care, I hope you find ways to share your passion with the church. Please let me know what practices you have incorporated into your life.

Or you can share your small steps at our Spirituality in Nature Group meetings, starting this coming Thursday, May 2nd at 6:30pm at Bertram Regional Park in Monticello. I have a SING brochure if you need details.

SING will offer earth care encouragement to each other. We all need all the encouragement and guidance we can get to face earth's brokenness.

In closing, I realize that as we grow over our lifetimes in our practices in caring for the earth, sometimes there are seasons of planting seeds. Seeds of truth get planted in our hearts and souls by the Spirit.

And then over time God gently brings them to life. In God's perfect timing and under his good care for each of us, those seeds grow into beautiful, good God-honoring and Earth-honoring actions.

Case in point, I didn't really realize as a kid the seeds being planted in my life by the Crying Indian Commercial.

It took me awhile to figure out. At first, I didn't know, that as an adult, where this deep joy came from in cleaning up the lakes and rivers in my kayak.

Why did picking up garbage in my kayak make me so happy? Like really happy? Like, I am not going to admit to other people how happy this makes me - happy? Where did that come from?

It's taken me a while to understand fully. But now I see how in cleaning up the lakes in my kayak I was finally finding a way to respond to that commercial...re-enacting what Iron Eyes was doing almost exactly.

I had found my way to comfort that crying man and do my part to clean up the lakes, protect our water.

Seeds planted long ago, God has helped them bear fruit later in life in my kayaking passion. And if you'd like to go out kayaking and cleaning up a lake sometime, let me know!

This is our last Sunday to wrestle with our special responsibility from God to care for the earth. This Sunday we wrap up our New Creation sermon series, bringing to a close this series on New Creation, by thinking about a small step we could take to care for the earth. **As we move to a time of reflection:** I invite you to ask the Lord in prayer, **"What one step can I add to my life, to care for the earth?"**