

# Caring for the Earth: THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO

March 13, 2019

## WELCOME

Week 1 (March 13): Our discussion this week will help us understand why and how creation care are a part of our vocation as Christians. We'll read scripture together, share our assumptions, and consider how our worldview impacts our connection (or disconnection) with the earth.

Weeks 2, 3, and 4 (March 20, 27, April 3): The middle three weeks of the series will literally, scripturally, and metaphorically consider the necessary elements of growth, both for life on earth and in our spiritual lives. Soil is about rootedness, diversity, and promise. Water reminds us of our baptism and our privilege. Air, wind, sunshine, spirit (the all-encompassing Hebrew: *ruach*) are necessary for transformation.

Week 5 (April 10): Our final session together will emphasize action. Leaning on ecologists and theologians such as Wangari Maathai, Sallie McFague, and Ellen Davis, we'll consider ways we as individuals and as a church community can more intentionally and vigorously care for the earth because the bible tells us so.

## WHY ARE WE HERE?

### Goals & Parameters

- Encounter, stay rooted in scripture
- Inspire, motivate environmental change (why, not how)
- Lent language – dust to dust, metanoia, repentance
- Emphasis on human responsibility, connection, relationship
- Conversational & experiential
- Sustainable meals
- Relevant & interesting to already environmentalists, skeptics, & the generally curious

What would you add, personally or collectively?

# MOTIVATION AND STYLE

What motivates your curiosity or call to creation care?

- Financial
- Ecological
- Guilt
- Despair
- Health
- Scriptural
- Spiritual
- Animal welfare
- Others

# YOUR OWN STORY

Since you woke up this morning or in the last 24 hours, how have you directly encountered the natural world? In what ways has creation or the environment shaped, changed, enhanced, or restricted your day?

Consider your familial and cultural ancestors. Or the founders of this country. Or the neighborhood you grew up in or currently live in. How have these people, cultures, and communities influenced your perception of creation and your relationship with the earth?

# FOUR SOURCE THEORY

It is generally accepted that there are four sources or voices combined to create the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). In order to better understand the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2, let's consider two of those four:

- **Yahwist** (writers of Genesis 2 creation story): Earliest source (10th c BC); anthropomorphizes God; emphasis on God's promises for salvation; likely written during Solomon or David's reign; call God "YHWH" translated "the LORD"
- **Priestly** (writers of Genesis 1 creation story): developed during & after exile (587 – 538 BC); emphasis on the role of the priestly class (Levites), ritual, worship, sorting, and order; call God "Elohim" translated God
- Other two are Elohist and Deuteronomist

For more information Google "documentary hypothesis," "Yahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, Priestly" or "four source theory," or see Resources on back of page for article recommendation.

# IN THE BEGINNING ...

## Genesis 1:28 (Priestly)

God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and **subdue** it; and have **dominion** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'

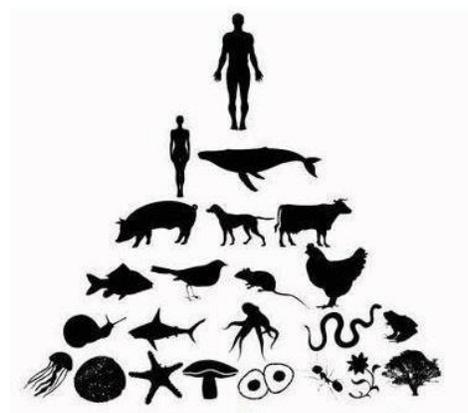
## Genesis 2:15 (Yahwist)

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to **till it and keep it**.

Three considerations for biblical exegesis:

1. **Context**, the biblical writer's and ours - historical, political, social, economic
2. **Attention to power & privilege**, again the biblical writer's and ours – what power might the writer be working to maintain or tear down? How does our own power and privilege impact our interpretation?
3. **Decentering** - reading the text from a different perspective than our own

## THEOLOGY OF DOMINION



## THEOLOGY OF DEPENDENCE



# ARROGANT EYE VS. LOVING EYE

Eco-feminist theologian Sallie McFague writes: “Made in God’s image, our eyes should imitate God’s: we should look at the world the way God does, with a loving, not an arrogant eye.”

## Arrogant Eye

- I/It, other as object
- Stares at, objectifies (dualistic)
- Sees the other as either “for me” or “against me”
- Simplifies in order to control
- Colonial, imperialistic, patriarchal

## Loving Eye

- I/Thou, Other as Subject
- Locks eyes & connects with as two subjects
- Sees complexity, mystery, difference
- Expands our understanding of “us”

# FINAL REFLECTION

Do you more strongly relate to a dominion theology of creation or one of dependence?

How does this inform your relationship to or care of creation?

Are you satisfied with your current view? If not, what questions do you have and where do you see opportunity for growth and change?

# RESOURCES

Four Source Theory: Saint Mary’s Press has a simple, helpful resource for differentiating between the four sources (<https://www.smp.org/resourcecenter/resource/3910/>) Googling “four source theory” or “documentary hypothesis” will also provide ample resources!

Sallie McFague describes the arrogant vs. loving eye in her book *Super, Natural Christians*, but a more accessible and free online resource is a 1998 article in *Macalester International* titled “The Loving Eye vs. the Arrogant Eye: A Christian Critique of the Western Gaze on Nature and the Third World” which can be downloaded here: <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/macintl/vol6/iss1/12/>

Dominion and dependence theology are fleshed out by Theodore Hiebert, a Mennonite scholar, in “Rethinking Dominion Theology” (<http://www.directionjournal.org/25/2/rethinking-dominion-theology.html>)