

YORKMINSTER PARK REFLECTS

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A Reflection from Ken Little

When thinking about our privilege and call to be stewards of the world in which God has placed us, I like to bring the conversation back to Jesus... *and* to the poor.

Jesus and the world

It is too easy for us to position our care of creation to be virtually the same as the environmentalist who is concerned about the way in which some human activity can negatively impact the natural world. However, as Christ followers, we have a much richer and deeper foundation from which to think about the world in which we live.

The Biblical case for care for the environment places humankind in the center of the action. In Genesis 1:28, we read... *God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."* Humans have the God-given right and responsibility to rule over nature. But this ruling is not to be one of exploitation but of care giving. (Genesis 2:15) *The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.*

And the way in which we interact with nature can be a joyful expression of our relationship with our loving Father for *"the earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."* (Psalm 24: 1)

I love the way in which Colossians 1:15 – 17 teaches us about the central role of Jesus in the created order. Not only is Jesus our Saviour and Lord in terms of our salvation and walk of faith, but *15 "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."*

The implications of this are profound. Jesus is the beginning and the end, the source and the sustainer of the created world. Without Jesus Christ, the universe would disintegrate into chaos and nothingness.

So, is it stretching the point to frame our interaction with the created world in a way that sees our efforts to rule over and care for the world as working together with Jesus our Saviour in His sustaining work in the universe? I don't think so. Caring for the world is one way in which we can express our faith in and our faithfulness to Jesus our Lord!

Jesus and the poor

In my travels around the world as a Senior Project Manager with World Renew (the disaster response, community development and justice department of the Christian Reformed Church in North America), I am able to see firsthand the tremendous inequality of our modern world. And I am privileged to be part of a Christian response to hunger and disaster.

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Just as we can see our engagement with the physical world as a partnership with Christ in His sustaining work, we can see our involvement in compassionate response to the poor as partnership with Christ as He guides us to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Pope Francis just issued an encyclical letter in which he reflects powerfully on the Christian responsibility to care for the earth. It is a document that all Christians should be familiar with, and is well worth the read.

On June 22, Harvard Divinity School Professor Ahmed Ragab wrote about the encyclical letter, "Adding to a traditional framework that locates religious views as necessary to provide a moral compass for the evolving science, the encyclical posits the Church as the voice of the poor and questions the inequality inherent in contemporary scientific production.

This orientation toward the poor and toward issues of justice and equality constitute the document's most important contribution, and frames the questions that it poses to all of us. The pope declared that ecological problems must be seen through the lens of inequality, poverty, and historical relations in a post-colonial world."

Creation stewardship is more than just care of the physical world. It is care for the environment in a way that understands the impacts of resource development and climate change on the poor, who often live on marginal lands where changing weather patterns may cause a famine or in contexts where the next flood may destroy their homes.

May God help us all to be fully engaged, as Jesus followers, with our world in the way Jesus is engaged, both in caring for creation and for the poor, so that God's Kingdom may come and His will be done on this earth.