

God, Life, and Everything Earth Day

Happy Earth Day! Yes, Earth Day is still a thing.

Today marks the 45th anniversary of the very first Earth Day, which is generally acknowledged as the birth of the environmental movement. It was a game changer in politics, science and public perception. It was also an example of how politicians can do the right thing.

In 1970, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was eight years old. That book - which was the first alarm that our human waste was doing terrible things to the planet - was popular, but its impact was still fairly limited. That may be because the US was embroiled in the Vietnam War, which consumed energy and attention of the young and politically active.

But in 1969, a US Senator, Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin used the energy of student protests to ignite a movement. His co-chair of that first Earth Day was Congressman Pete McCloskey of California. Together, the Democrat Nelson and Republican McCloskey exemplified the best of bipartisanship and forward thinking. They got 20 million Americans to hit the streets that first April 22.

More importantly, the publicity that the environment got that day resulted in the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (again, a bipartisan effort) and the passage of the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act. (This information taken from Earthday.org).

Oddly, over the years, the environment has become a political hot potato. No longer a bipartisan issue, too often we see vitriol directed at "tree huggers." The backlash was strong, especially by corporations that use and discharge waste from natural resources. When regulations became too bothersome here, many of those companies went to countries with fewer scruples about waste. I recently spoke with a man who worked for a law firm in China for eight years. He said that the most egregious polluters in China were US factories (or contractors for US companies). Money is a strong motivator.

So after 45 years, Earth Day still has a lot of work to do. It has to convince the world that taking care of the planet matters - not only to tiny animals we've never heard of, but to us and our children.

You may be surprised to discover that, for Christians (and probably members of other religions, but I would never presume to speak for them), care for the environment is also important. You might not think so if you hear a lot of rhetoric when it comes to climate change, but liberal and conservative Christians alike have a religious reason for taking care of the planet.

Billy Graham wrote back in 2006 that "Christians know God created the world, and we are only its stewards or trustees.... We don't worship the earth; instead, we realize that God gave it to us, and we are accountable to Him for how we use it." Even if a Christian does not acknowledge global warming, he or she does understand their responsibility to care for the earth. It belongs to God. Everything in it belongs to God. Every bird, fish, mammal, insect ... they all belong to God, and we must account to God for how we treat them.

In our prayer book, which was revised in the 1970s, there is a eucharistic prayer that we affectionately call the "Star Wars" prayer. The language is dated, but it gives a sense of why this is important to Christians. "God of all power, Ruler of the Universe, you are

worthy of glory and praise. At your command all things came to be; the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses, and this fragile earth, our island home....You made us rulers of creation. But we turned against you, and betrayed your trust." Our faith leads us to regain that trust.

I don't plan on going to any marches or rallies on Earth Day. But I will, weather permitting, make my rounds on my scooter or bicycle - (the bicycle only for in the village - I'm not that great an athlete). I will pay attention to the waste I create - I'll avoid the single-use water bottle in favor of my reusable. I'll avoid the paper coffee cup in favor of my good old ceramic. That sort of thing. I will think about the world my children are inheriting from me, and the work they will have to keep it livable.

How will you mark the 45th anniversary of Earth Day? I hope it will be with a sense of seriousness.