

Isaiah 65:17-25
2 Thessalonians 3:6-13
November 14, 2010

The God Who Works at Recycling

The first time I ever rode in someone's hybrid car was kind of weird. The electric part of the car made a whirling hum engine sound and when the car stopped at a traffic light, it was likely to simply shut off. The engine didn't idle while standing still, it shut off to save gas and wear and tear. As soon as the light turns green when the driver presses on the gas, off she goes. No idling for Hybrids. Some of these new hybrid cars even have parts in them made from recycled plastic. Maybe Hybrid and electric cars will help our nation to clean up our air and to be less dependent on foreign oil.

The Apostle Paul is concerned about idling. What a waste, he says, that some of the Christians in the church at Thessalonica do not work. They are idle he complains mooching off the other members of the church; Mere busybodies, stirring up drama while sitting on their derrieres. This must stop he complains, in fact, if they don't work, they don't deserve to eat. At first glance you might think that this is a text book biblical case against welfare, but Paul also wrote many letters asking Christians to support the poor, the widow,

the orphans and the disabled. No what's bugging Paul is able bodied Christians doing way less than their fair share.

Many first century Christians chose to live in communities where they shared meals and other belongings. They pooled resources to avoid ups and downs and poverty, and to support and take care of one another in faith; just as they thought Jesus had taught them. Interesting thing about Christians in the first century is that they generally believed that the second coming of Jesus was was eminent. Some little sneaks in the church at Thessalonica; thought to themselves; "self, if Jesus is coming back any day now and soon we will all be in the new heaven, the new earth and the new Jerusalem; we might just as well take it easy." They figured they had a ticket to heaven so why sweat? We are living proof that they had their calendars a little confused.

Obviously in any organization, when some people don't pull their weight other people get annoyed. Apparently Paul had gotten wind of these lazy butts and was trying to recycle their efforts. You know it is supposedly common knowledge that in most organizations 20% of the people do 80% of the work. I am happy to report to you that I have noticed over these past two weeks with the Winter Relief

Homeless Shelter, the Craft Fair and our regular Ministries; that I have seen hundreds of us in this congregation in action. A lot of work by a lot of people and very well spread around. There is even evidence of some fatigue. Everybody deserves breakfast today. It has been a tremendous few weeks in this church.

A few of us at Ark and Dove have been reading a book called Green Church, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle Rejoice, by Rebekkah Simon-Peter a Methodist minister. I think the title is somewhat self explanatory; but one of the things we wanted to do as a group was get our theology straight, before we started talking about Green practices for a congregation. We began at the beginning, words from Genesis, where after people were created they were invited to subdue the earth and have dominion. A closer look at those words in Genesis, 1 reveal that that God was charging us as humanity to be good stewards of this garden called earth. A steward is someone who has been entrusted the property of another for management. A good steward not only takes care of the property but returns it to the owner in even better shape than when they received it.

A closer look at other portions of scripture also showed us that God indeed is the owner of the earth. As Psalm 24 says, "the earth

is the Lord's and all that is in it; the world and those who live in it." It could be that our pollution, our squandering and our marring of the natural resources of this globe comes from our failure to appreciate that we have been loaned this garden planet. Earth and Stars haven't been deeded over to us, as much as they have been leased. We are free to use it but we are called to use it wisely and manage it justly. It is clear that God calls Christians to be Green. It's not always easy to figure out how best to be Green but God calls us to give it our best shot.

But the Bible is even more surprising than some of us had imagined. Not only does God own the earth and stars, not only does God call us to be good stewards of the creation; but God intends to save the whole earth as well as people. To put it another way salvation through Jesus Christ is not just for people, salvation is for the whole earth.

God says through Isaiah in the 65th chapter. For I am about create new heavens and a new earth, everything is going to be recycled. In this new place, there will be adequate housing, lots of food, employment for everyone and health until a very old age. Infant

mortality will be wiped out and things will be so peace filled that the wolf and lamb will feed together and the Lion will eat straw.

Having grown up in the church, I had heard lots of talk about the good things that Jesus was going to do for me and for other people and a whole lot about the good I/we should be doing for other people; it just never occurred to me that any of these great promises of God might be for the plants the animals and the ecosystem. Sometimes it takes a crises or a disaster to get our race to really think about the things that are important to us. Humanity it seems is like this. It often takes a lot to get our attention. Soul searching about our environment reveals that God's compassion extends beyond humanity to all creation.

Today as you know is More Than Enough pledge dedication Sunday. Pledge cards are on each row of chairs. About 90 of 135 households pledge to our mission and ministry budget and about 130 support it financially. Only a few of us are idle, but for those who are generous but don't pledge, let me say it sure would be considerate of you to pledge. Your brothers and sisters called elders and Finance team leaders would find their church leadership much less stressful if they had a clue about your intentions.

In the context of writing this sermon, it occurred to me that in one way stewardship is recycling. We take the gifts which God has entrusted to us, in particular our know-how and passions, our financial resources and assets our time and our attention and we reuse them for God and for God's church. We answer God's call to transform the world. Although re-gifting is in some circles considered a faux pas, re-gifting is exactly what God calls us to do with our lives. When we offer our prayers and confession and we receive the assurance of pardon, we are recycling our spirits. When we dedicate our offering we are rededicating our hearts. When we pledge we reuse our resources. In the face of all the waste in our culture, it may well help us to think of recycling as a faith call from God. The God who recycles our idleness and sin into faith and ministry also calls us to clean up our world. I'll bet that if we practice truly good stewardship, we will find there is more than enough for everyone.