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Glen Ridge Congregational Church

“The Good Shepherds”



Sunday, April 26, 2026
John 10:1 - 10

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our lives, be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

Amen.

This past Wednesday, our nation, and people around the world, celebrated a secular holiday: Earth Day - a day to celebrate the great gift this planet is, and a day for all of us to recommit to taking care of it, healing it from the environmental crisis that humanity has created which is impacting it from all sides.

For those of us who might not know the history of Earth Day, it was first proposed in 1969 as a response to an oil spill that happened off the coast of California. An oil platform operated by Union Oil failed and spilled over 3

million gallons of oil into the sea, killing an untold number of birds, fish, dolphins, seals, and other kinds of marine life. For those who witnessed this tragedy, they vowed to pursue legislation that would avert a similar disaster from ever happening again.

But they did more than that. They proposed a day when all people could come together to celebrate the beauty and fragility of our common home, and also reenergize themselves for the work needed to continue protecting the diverse and unique ecology of the Earth. A year after the Union Oil spill, the first Earth Day celebrations were held within the United States. By 1990, the observance of Earth Day had gone global with events hosted in 141 countries. This year, you may have seen and participated in events held all around our world, and even locally, here in town, and our neighboring communities.

I have called Earth Day a secular holiday, but we should remember that the word “holiday” has its roots in the words “holy day”. A holiday is a holy day where our lives, and the life of our world, are taken out of their ordinary rhythms and re-seen in the light of the sacred. A holy day is a day when we see God’s presence all around us, and where we respond by acting in ways different from a normal day. We eat differently. We gather differently. We sing special songs. We hear special stories. We might even wear special clothes.

Did you act differently on Earth Day? Did you plant native plants in your garden, which will feed the pollinators? Did you help clean up a local river? Did you write your congressperson asking them to recommit to protecting our shared world in the upcoming votes they will make on your behalf?

For us, for the followers of Christ, Earth Day is also a holiday, a holy day, because it is a day in which we remember that this planet is a gift created by God; that all of the plants and animals, the stars and planets, are an expression of God’s love. It is also a day when we are reminded that God placed us on Earth to tend it and take care of it. We are to mimic God’s love for Creation by loving it ourselves, not by approaching it as a dead resource to be used simply to satiate our own desires, without regard for its inherent sacredness.

If we remember the stories of Creation, we may also remember that everything came into being through God's word. God spoke the heavens and the earth into being. And without God's word, nothing came into existence. In this week of Earth Day celebrations, we, as followers of the Christ, remember that our spiritual ancestors tell us that Christ is the word of God, and that it is through him that all things were made to be. Christ is the voice that Creation knows most intimately, and recognizes that it is spoken in a tone of love. And it responds in trust and attraction, just like the sheep of today's reading.

If we are to call ourselves the followers of Jesus, then we too are to speak with Christ's voice as we speak to God's Creation all around us. We are to speak through our actions, which are to mimic the creative and loving embrace that he showed at the beginning of time. We are to remember that we are charged by God to be the loving keepers of our world, that we are to be its good shepherds through the daily decisions we make about what we buy, how we dispose of our waste, what kinds of energy we use, what kinds of regulations we ask our government to make and abide by. We are asked to act locally, all the while thinking globally, all the while acting according to our belief in the inherent sacredness of the world around us.

How might this church act in new ways to show that we care for God's Creation? Might we choose to source our electricity from a local solar farm? Might we install heat pumps to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels? Might we change the plantings in our gardens to increase the food available to the birds and animals we share Glen Ridge with?

Because, if we don't do these kinds of things, we will be speaking with another voice, a voice which the Creation understands as not being the voice of Christ, who asks us to love our neighbors as ourselves, even our non-human neighbors, even our non-sentient neighbors. Because if we don't speak and act like Christ, we will be like the thieves in our reading, that only come "to steal and kill and destroy".

Don't we hear the voice of the thief all around us? Don't we see humanity stealing the habitats of so many beautiful creatures to expand our own homes

and buildings? Don't we see humanity overconsuming our fisheries, and logging our forests to oblivion? Don't we see humanity raising the temperature of our atmosphere and oceans to the point where they can no longer sustain life as we have known it?

Although we are in the season of Eastertide, the season of resurrection, when we look out at the state of the world in this Earth Day week, we can almost feel like we are still travelling through Lent, the season of corrosion and brokenness. But Lent is more than a catalogue of failure; it is also a call to repentance - to changing the direction of our future path so that we can come closer to God's dream for us, and for this beautiful world. To repent is to look honestly at our collective actions and hear with whose voice we speak. Do we speak with the voice of the Good Shepherd, who loves and cares for our world, or do we speak with the voice of the thief, who steals and destroys?

To confess during this Earth Day week that we may not be speaking collectively with the unalloyed voice of the Good Shepherd does take courage. But it also allows us the space to see where we do speak with his voice, and where there are opportunities to change our actions, so that we will be recognized more deeply and profoundly by the Creation as its caretaker and protector.

So, in this Earth Day week, let us have our hearts be reminded by a secular holiday - a secular *holy day* - that we have a sacred duty to protect and nurture God's Creation and that we, as the followers of Christ, are charged to speak to it in words of love and acts of compassion.

Amen.