

“The Natural World”- Luke 12:13-21 – Rev. Jeff Childs

All You Can Eat. I don’t know about you, but I do my best to resist the great temptation of the “All You Can Eat Buffet.” The good life is not a life of overindulgence. We sometimes find ourselves consumed with consuming - consuming much more than we need to, in some hope of finding true satisfaction. Clearly there is something within us as human beings that is tempted to conclude that the more we have, the happier we will be. We are consuming the natural resources of the natural world.

In our Gospel lesson from Luke, Jesus encounters a man who wants more from his brother in a dispute over their inheritance. But Jesus makes clear that he wasn’t really interested in providing arbitration for family disputes over who gets what. Instead, he uses the man’s request as a teachable moment for us all. What follows is what we call “the Parable of the Rich Fool” who also wants more and more, and then when he gains more and more he dies (and presumably then leaves his children to fight over the inheritance!) This simple parable serves as the backdrop for our consideration of the United Methodist Social Principle that addresses the matter of our over consumption of natural resources in regards to the welfare of the earth and all who dwell upon it.

The Earth Is the Lord’s. (Psalm 24.1) The story of creation reminds us that we were put here by God to care for the earth, to be good stewards or caretakers of God’s creation. *The LORD God took the human and settled him in the Garden of Eden to farm it and to take care of it.* (Genesis 2.15) The paragraph on “The Natural World” in the Social Principles begins with these words, “All creation is the Lord’s, and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it.” We need to develop an ethic of responsible consumption rather than treating the world like it is an all you can consume buffet. In order to make changes and choices to sustain the planet, it is absolutely necessary to be clear about our own values and how we will choose to live in light of them.

Once we have gained the clarity we need in terms of our own values, we will then be able to make decisions about our consumption that are not contingent upon what all we want, but upon what is needed and what is beneficial not only for ourselves, but for others and for our planet. For example, when we buy groceries, will we consider the impact of Styrofoam and plastic in our landfills or upon our oceans and marine life? Or, will we simply opt for those products which are most convenient for our “on the go” life style? Are they easy choices to make? Not exactly! Are they important choices to make? Most assuredly! For they are choices that often do have a direct impact upon the welfare of others and upon the well being of our planet.

Our Social Principles remind us that we have the opportunity and yes, the responsibility to make choices concerning what we consume, how we consume and how much we consume—choices that are reflective of the values and convictions that we hold. In spite of what our culture may try to tell us, the good life that we long for is not to be found on the escalating treadmill of our insatiable desire for more. No, the good life that we seek is often found in the surprising discovery that less can be more; that by choosing to focus less upon the things that we want, and more upon that which we—and others—need, upon that

which is truly beneficial, we will experience a richness toward God, toward one another, and toward our planet that satisfies our deepest longing for a life that truly matters.

Many of us know the 3 “R’s.” No not Reading, ‘Riting and ‘Rithmetic, but Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. Rev. Rebekah Simon-Peter has written a couple books including one I read entitled *Green Church*. She has expanded it to 6 “R’s” and made it into a small group study of Repent, Reclaim, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Rejoice. She offers practical tips for churches and individuals wishing to live out this social principle of being good stewards of God’s good earth. I know that in the past a number of us have been involved in Earth Day on April 22nd, but what if we look at 2025 as “Earth Year!” Some churches have developed policies and practices of using mugs instead of Styrofoam cups and involved in recycling efforts. But we can do more, as good stewards we must do more to care for God’s earth. During the upcoming Lenten season as we look at what we might give up, let us give up over consuming. And follow the 6 R’s. Alleluia and Amen.

Creator of Creation

Jeffrey B. Childs 2/3/2025

(Tune: McKee UMH 548)

Creator of creation,
We call upon your name.
Hear our humble supplication,
We offer in our shame.

All that you have made in glory,
We have defiled by greed.
For this we are truly sorry.
And for your mercy plead.

God, please give us another chance,
To do what you decreed.
That we find a better balance,
And this time may succeed.