

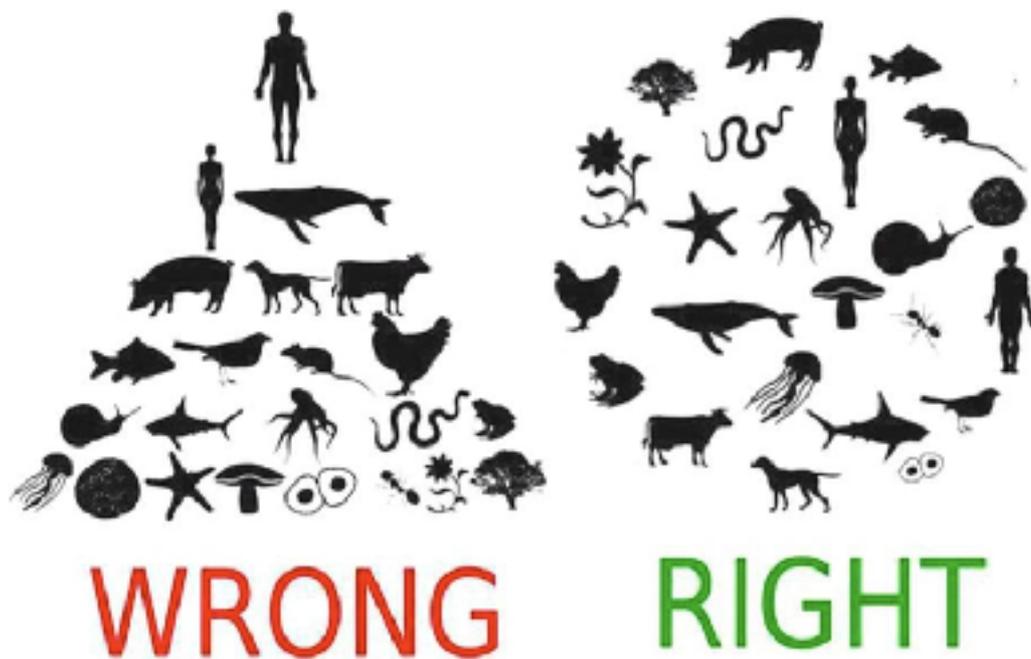
Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Second of Four Sermons in a Series entitled “Sacred Creation”
“Cosmocentrism Is the *New Anthropocentrism*”

The Reverend Dr. Scott Everett Couper

Hebrew Scripture: Genesis 1:6-23

Christian Scripture: Romans 8:18-25

Sunday, 5 May 2019



I usually don't tell too many jokes in sermons. I guess the reason is because I'm pretty focused on what I want to say and, well, Jesus didn't begin the Sermon on the Mount or his conversation with the woman at the well with a joke. But, sometimes it's not too good to be so serious all the time. So, here we go, a climate change joke:

A climate scientist and a climate change denier walk into a bar. The denier says, “Bartender, show me your strongest whiskey”. The

bartender says, “This one here. It's 95 percent alcohol”. The denier slams down his fist and leaves the bar in a hurry. The scientist says, “You know, that's the problem with these guys. You show them the proof, and they still don't buy it”.

I know I'm getting a bit ahead of myself as I bring-up science and climate change with this joke. Rather than go forward, let us re-trace our steps backward and review last week.



Last week, we took a brief survey of our biblical text and noticed that it was saturated, it was pregnant, with references to, illustrations of, and examples using the environment to tell the story of God's love affair with the world, the cosmos, the universe, that God created and declared very good (Genesis 1:31).

Today, I would like us to go deeper. I would like us to look below the surface of biblical references to, illustrations of and examples using the environment and go deeper into the substance, into the foundation, of our relationship with God and the Earth.

I would like us to start with what is often the seminal text children memorize as a foundation of our faith: John 3:16. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” This reading fascinates me, for it moves, at least in its English translation, from God’s love of ‘the world’, the cosmos, to an understanding of our salvation in one sentence. Notice, the verse begins, “for God so loved *the world*”. This verse affirms that which we read in Genesis. God created the world, and everything in it he declared very good. So, it makes a great deal of sense to hear “For God so loved *the world*...”.

Cosmo =
Creation/Earth/Environment
Centric = Focus

In the beginning of this verse, “for God so loved the world”, we have what can theologically be called a ‘cosmocentric’ (a world-centred or world-focused) understanding of God and our relationship with God. This paradigm holds the world, the cosmos, the environment, as primary, as most important, as determinative, as *central*. This cosmocentric view of the world is carried through quite strongly in the Hebrew scriptures, especially in the Psalms (148) and

the book of Job (38, 39, 41). God is perceived as preoccupied, if not mostly concerned, with the cosmos.

Anthropo = Human

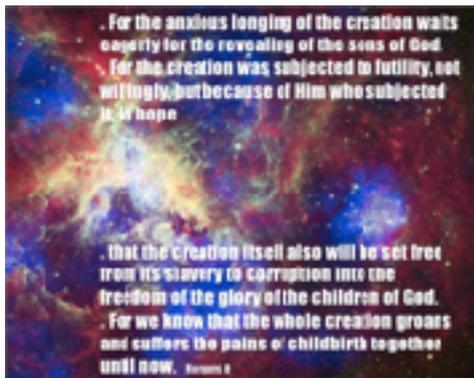
Centric = focused

Yet as we progress to the Christian scriptures, we as human beings deepen our relationship with God, we become more self-obsessed, more self-absorbed and we begin to see us, human beings, as God's primary, or central concern. Hence, we have the second portion of John 3:16, "that whosoever believes in me shall not perish but have everlasting life". This is an 'anthropocentric' (a human-centered or human-focused) understanding of God, where we view that God offers salvation primarily, if not exclusively, to us as human beings.

This movement from cosmocentrism to anthropocentrism can be seen as far back in Genesis where it has its roots. The shift from cosmocentrism to anthropocentrism began when we understood that God gave humans 'dominion' over all that God had created (Genesis 1:28). This understanding that God gave human beings possession of the Earth gave rise to our modern understanding that we can strip it, mine it, rape it, and pollute it for our own insatiable desire for more growth, more development, more money, more comfort, more, more,

more. The Earth can be plundered for human beings' benefit, and worse, in our political climate, for the United States' 3-4% percent growth rate (and to hell with the planet for that growth rate that has become our idol).

Now, it is important to realize that the currents of cosmocentrism run concurrent with those of anthropocentrism - the two are intertwined. At times in the Bible cosmocentrism is emphasized more than anthropocentrism and at times anthropocentrism is emphasized more than cosmocentrism. The important thing to understand is that it is not an either/or choice. Both have to be held in a creative tension for us to have a balanced understanding of God's love for the world and our relationship with it and God.



Our scripture reading from Romans chapter eight is brilliant. Here the apostle Paul reaches back into the sacred Hebraic texts. In his understanding of his relationship with the risen Christ and its meaning

for all humanity, Paul pulls-up a wealth of cosmocentric thought. Let us listen:

“¹⁹ *For the creation* waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ *For the creation* was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ *that the creation* itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

²² We know that *the whole creation* has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved.”



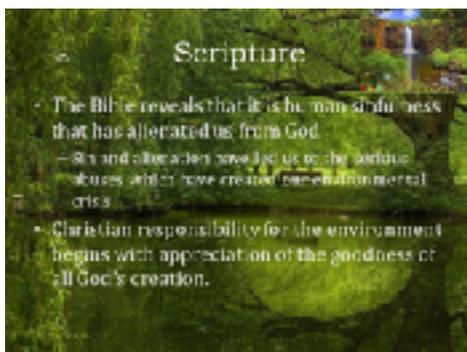
Friends in Christ, here as elsewhere throughout our scriptures, especially in Ezekiel (chapter 47), Isaiah (41:18-20), and the book of Revelation (chapters 21-22), the salvation for which you and I hope for is also the salvation for which Creation also hopes and receives.

Because “God so loves the world”, God includes it in God’s salvific plan and thus seeks to redeem it. Friends, salvation is for the Earth as much, if not more so, than it is for us. Therefore, if you and are to partner with God through Christ Jesus, to proclaim the gospel, the good news, to bring forth the kingdom of God through the establishment of justice and demonstration of love for other human beings’ salvation, then doesn’t it make sense that we are also to establish justice and to demonstrate love for the environment and thus foster its salvation?

Now, to conclude, I would like us for a moment to think logically, rather than theologically. Within the political realm there is a debate as to which is primary, humans and their economies or the Earth. Many would have an anthropocentric view and claim human needs come first. Yet, if humans are a part of and within the environment, for it is our home, is it not accurate to understand that by putting the Creation first, we therefore put ourselves first? Cosmocentrism is the *new* anthropocentrism. It is so logically. It is so scientifically. It is so theologically. It is so biblically. May it also be so existentially and politically.

The beauty
of creation
• Praises •
God's name!!!
• Psalm 148 •

I tell you the truth, throughout the scriptures, when humans rejoice and praise God in right relationship, the environment is described as 'lush'. And when humans sin, the environment is described as 'desolate'.



When people are described as saved, the environment is described as saved, and vice-versa, over and over and over and over and over again (Psalm 98).



Join us next week, as we explore the damage we are doing to Mother Earth. On Mother's Day, we will explore God as a 'she', how she gave birth to us and how her destruction is our own.



This is the word of God, and it was preached to the people of God, and the people of God responded, "Amen!"