

House of God's Creation

Psalm 8; John 20:19-31

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In the 1890s, a wealthy cattle rancher in La Junta, Colorado built a unique stone Victorian house. With its hand-hewn exterior stone walls, wrap-around porch, second story cedar shake shingles, and slate roof, it was a magnificent house. Inside, the foyer was highlighted with an oak stairway. To the left of the foyer was a large room with a bay window. To the right, a smaller sitting room. The front room was a library. The back room was the kitchen with built-in cupboards and a rear storage room. Upstairs were 5 bedrooms and an inside bathroom, almost unheard of in those days. It was the showpiece of the community.

For years, the house remained in pristine condition as subsequent family members, thriving in the cattle business, maintained the house in its original condition. Eventually, however, people outside the family bought the house. Perhaps because they lacked financial means or an understanding of the history connected to the house, the house fell into disrepair. Oh, people still lived in the house, but the gardens—instead of beautiful flowers—were overrun with weeds. The shake shingles needed to be scraped and painted; the hand-hewn stones repointed. The interior became equally shabby. Wallpaper, now aged, was dry and peeling. The hardwood oak floors were marred and stained.

In time, the house became vacant. Now with a total lack of care, this beautiful Victorian house became an eyesore for the community. Vagrants often slept in it. Where this house had once been a source of community pride, it was now an embarrassment, and many wanted it demolished.

Last year, my son, who lives in Colorado Springs and is a contractor/handyman, wanted to invest in some rental property in La Junta. His wife was very skeptical about this Victorian house; it was a disaster! But Tim saw its potential. He could envision its lost beauty now hidden under piles of garbage and trash that had accumulated over years of neglect. With this vision, Tim bought the house, and he and a friend have been restoring it together. We saw it when we were in Colorado in May. It is a wonderful house, still in need of a lot of work, but in listening to my son, I could capture some of his vision and excitement for its restoration.

Reflecting on the renovation of this neglected house, I thought about our responsibility to restore the house of God's creation.

To me, all of creation is God's great house. From Genesis 1, *God created*. God is the architect, the builder of his house – creation. He began with the foundation – earth; the heavens – the roof. From there God added light. He developed a water system. Yes, I know I'm taking liberties with this text, but I believe all of creation is God's house. We live within its shelter and resources.

In Genesis 1:31, following the creation of all living creatures and vegetation: *"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."* I like that: the origin of life, according to God, *was very good*. Colossian 1:16 *"For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him."* If all of life is created by God; all of life is a manifestation of God, then all of life is spiritual. Caring for and tending to God's house (this world) is therefore a spiritual responsibility. Not a political issue or a scientific issue, but a spiritual responsibility as it relates to God's creativity.

Psalm 8 “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.”

Scripture is clear that creation is *God’s house*—our physical and spiritual *house*—and we are responsible for maintaining it in a pristine manner. But like the Victorian house in La Junta, generations of neglect have caused great harm to *God’s house*.

How does our perception change when we begin to experience the natural world as God’s sacred house?

Our Christian faith looks ahead to the renewal of *all things* (Matt 19:28), to the restoration of *all things* (Acts 3:21), to the day when humans live in peace with God, with each other, and with all of God’s creation. Folks, the good news in Christ is not just for us; it’s for the whole earth and everyone in it. Protecting our earthly *house* that God entrusted to our care is central to being Christian. It’s a faithful response to the very first task given to humans in Genesis – to *till and keep* the earth (Gen 2:15), to be stewards and caregivers. Prophets and sages throughout the Bible, culminating in Jesus himself, urge us to participate with God in creating a community in which people live together in balance and harmony, in a *shalom* of justice, wholeness, and peace.

I want to stop here, for a moment, because I think many of us find ourselves locked up tight. The brutal war in Ukraine, the appalling revelations of corruption and self-serving in the halls of power, the crushing weight of racism and economic inequality – all these overwhelm us with the power of sin and death. World news may drive us further into despair: relentless rise in global temperatures, increasingly severe storms, polluted rivers, wildfires and historic drought out West.

In Pennsylvania, 1,482,810 people live within a ½ mile of a natural gas facility, and over 200,000 children pre-kindergarten to 12th grade attend schools within that same ½ mile threat radius.¹ Medical studies have clearly demonstrated that living within the threat radius and being exposed to leaking methane, benzene, and other toxic chemicals results in a 25% increase in low birth weight in infants, significant reductions in infant health, and lifelong health concerns: increased brain, spine or spinal cord birth defects, increased congenital heart defects, up to a 25% increase in children’s asthma, and up to an 86-times-greater exposure to known cancer-causing chemicals.²

What’s a person to do but duck their head, close the door, and turn off the TV, right? It’s easy to slide into *doomerism* – into hopeless conviction that it’s too late to turn this around. It’s not my responsibility, the future is set in stone and can’t be changed. At some point, we lost sight of the fact that to harm nature is to harm ourselves and our future.

But into the closed room of denial steps the risen Christ. We see in John’s text that Christ isn’t deterred by locked doors or locked hearts. He comes and stands among us, breathing peace and hope. Can we let Jesus draw near and, with our next breath, breathe in his presence, inhale his love and hope? As we exhale, can we extend that compassion to the world – God’s house? Experiencing the resurrection is as intimate as breathing

¹ <https://oilandgasthreatmap.com/threat-map/>

² <https://www.healthfirstpa.org/uploads/1/2/6/1/126191702/hfpa.brochure.pdf>

in and out, as intimate as the beating of a heart that is beginning to soften, and a mind beginning to understand.

As Jesus breathes peace into his frightened, awestruck disciples, he shows them his wounded hands and side. When Thomas refuses to believe unless he sees and touches the mark of the nails, Jesus invites him to reach out and touch the wounds.

I wonder what the disciples see when they look at Jesus' wounds. Surely in those wounds they see the harsh reality of suffering and death, but I wonder if those wounds are symbolic of renewed hope and a new creation; I wonder if the disciples see all the wounds in their lives, all the wounds of the world, that have been taken up into God. I wonder what it would be like if we could look at the wounds of creation like that. I wonder if we could learn to see the wounded Earth, the crumbling house of God, as revealing not only the harsh reality of suffering and death, but also with God's undying vision of restoring love.

I wonder what it would be like if, in tending to the wounded body of creation, we knew we were also ministering to the wounds of Christ, so that in every act of love for creation—in every choice we made, say, to recycle more, to compost, to use natural or organic fertilizers, to advocate for state and federal policies that promote renewable energy, to use more energy efficient cars, to use more energy efficient household appliances—we were honoring the presence of the wounded and risen Christ.

As a husband, father, grandfather, follower of Jesus, who loves the world that God made, I invite you to enter into a journey of vision and transformation as we work together to build a just and sustainable future for God's creation.