

PASTOR SCOTT'S

MONTHLY MESSAGE



October's Goal

October ushers in the first full month of fall. October also begins with us recalling the connection we have with Christians across all spaces and spanning all time on World Communion Sunday (October 7). And then we move into a season of focus on Stewardship. We speak of being good stewards of our wealth, our time, and our talents. Today, I'd like to reflect on being a steward of God's creation.

I came across a long interview with Dr. Michael Soule. He is 80 and has been a scientist at the center of the global environmental movement since 1968. For the past several decades his focus has been on biodiversity.

Michael explains that we are in the Sixth Great Extinction. It's the only extinction event in the planet's history caused by animals, as opposed to volcanic activity or an ice age or a meteor impact. The animal is us; we aren't being very good stewards of creation.

"Few people - few politicians, especially - actually give a darn about the damages to nature. Scientists, however, are coming out and saying that, unless we act in a determined and organized way, what we are doing to the climate will mean the end of civilization as we know it in 50 to 100 years. ... Humanity won't last in our current numbers."

He goes on, "We all think this way. It's human nature to be concerned mostly with short-term threats. We don't change our behavior to avoid future disasters. Instead we wait around for something to force us to change ... we didn't evolve to deal with these medium- and long-term crises. Immediate crises we can deal with superbly. When the lion is circling our camp *right now*, we're very capable of protecting our children and livestock."

But, crises that are further out on the horizon ... we excel in procrastination. Giving up something today for those down the road ... our self-interest steers us back to the short term. However, Dr. Soule goes on to say that *eventually* the impacts from our consumption of creation will put such an overwhelming stress on our daily lives that all, including politicians, will be concerned. Unfortunately, by then it will be too late for a lot a species, a lot of places, and a lot of human communities.

Benjamin Franklin noted a similarity about how we govern/control ourselves, "Those who govern, having much business on their hands, do not generally like to take the trouble of considering and carrying into execution new projects. The best public measures are therefore seldom adopted from previous wisdom, but forced by the occasion."

Is this our fate? Are we destined to continue viewing nature as something to profit from even as it provides diminishing returns due to our practices that are destroying it? Dr. Soule sees hope from two groups. One is conservationists, people who seek to conserve nature, to let wildness exist, who steward this creation.

The other group ... "Maybe it's a foolish hope to lean on, but religious Christians represent another potential group of voters who care about nature. The Bible says God created everything and pronounced it good. That must mean biodiversity is good, right? If we are destroying creation, surely that's a bad thing in the eyes of God. ... At least there is some common ground there, a point of contact, between the religious folks and conservationists. Maybe together these groups can act as a kind of brake on our short-term economic impulses."

We could care about biodiversity because the extinction of some species would spell a downward spiral that severely impacts human existence. This would be a good reason, but it is not Dr. Soule's. "Species have an intrinsic value. They are valuable simply because they exist." God created them; just as our value is established by God, so is the value of every species. "They don't need our stamp of approval. Biodiversity doesn't have to be of use."

In loving biodiversity we may come to see this intrinsic value in all facets of creation, even mosquitos. Again, Dr. Soule, "I insist we talk about love in conservation, because we only protect what we love. ... Maybe it takes a tangible threat to our home environment to make us realize that we really do love the earth. Almost everything important in our lives comes back to love."

If we understand ourselves as part of creation (rather than an *overlord* of creation) we will come to see ourselves as part of a larger whole. Our intrinsic self-interest then expands to include our home environment. "If we *are* the land, then we should want to protect the land." We should intrinsically be stewards of creation.

"I think a spiritual practice is useful. For one thing, it can make us more aware of our self-centeredness. The self-centeredness will never entirely go away, but at least we

can develop a sense of humor about it, learn to laugh at our greed and anger and foibles. We can never be perfect, but we can always be better.”

This October let’s work on stewardship. As World Communion reminds us of our connection to peoples in all places and peoples in all times (past and future), may we be led into greater care of this planet that is home to all. May we work on loving God’s creation, loving the land that is our home, loving biodiversity so that God’s flora and fauna may continue to exist. We will likely never be perfect stewards, but we can always grow into being *better* stewards - starting today!

Peace,

Pastor Scott