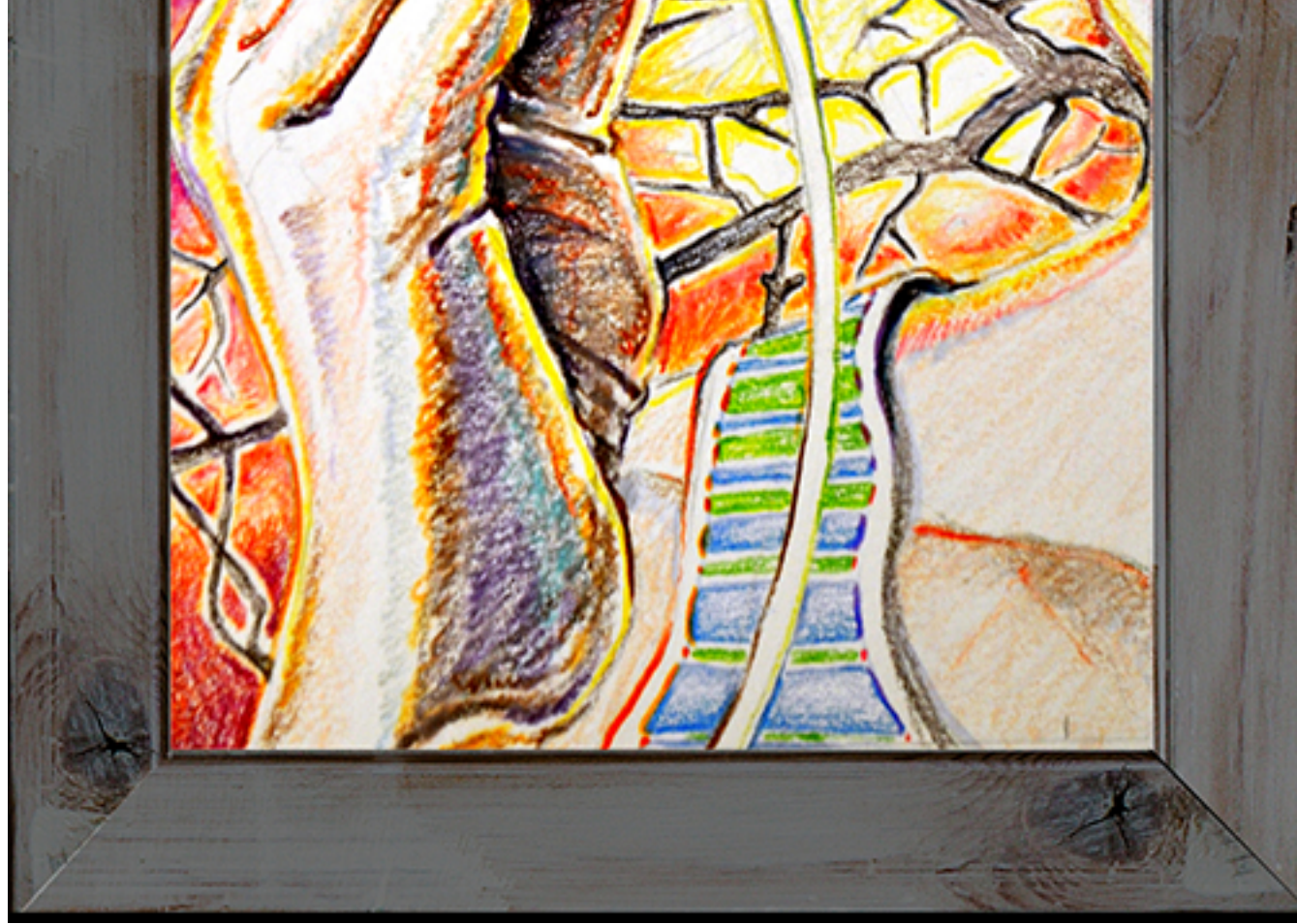




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Living in Repentant Hope: Sermon Study





Enfolded (Interior 3)

Artist: Karl Fay, 2013

[\(assets/images/EnfoldedInteriorPanel3Print.jpg\)](#)

Biblical Theology and Ecology:

This series of sermons has sought to help the church awaken to the wonder of God's work in creation. At times, it seems as if the story of salvation has been truncated in the church. Rather than proclaim the biblical story from creation to the new creation, the church proclaims the fall into sin and the death of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. With such a truncated story, it is easy for people to lose sight of their bodies and of the world they live in. In this shortened version, what matters most are our souls and the salvation of our souls by the death of Jesus. Yet, when Jesus rose from the dead, he rose with his body and, when the apostle Paul speaks about the good news of salvation, he speaks about "the redemption of our bodies" and the renewal of all creation, finally "set free from its bondage to corruption" (Romans 8:18-24). This sermon series has sought to proclaim the fullness of the Christian story with the goal that God's people will enter more richly and intentionally into their God-given vocation of care for the created world. The series has anchored our care of creation in Christ, the Second Adam, ruling over all things (sermon 1) and encouraged God's people to discover delight in the wonder of creation (sermon 2) and participate faithfully and responsibly in the stewardship of creation (sermon 3).

During the course of this sermons series, perhaps members of your congregation have initiated projects as part of their care for creation. That's good. Unfortunately, it is also difficult to sustain such work over time. While it is relatively easy to be struck by the wonder of God's beautiful creation, it doesn't take long until one begins to see a darker side. Watch the nature channel for too long and you will soon see death and dismemberment. Watch the weather channel for too long and you will soon see the horrifying effects of floods and

drought, earthquakes and tornados. Livable land turned into waste places. Although created good by God, creation has suffered effects from the fall into sin. God cursed the ground (Gen. 3:18) and the forces of nature at times fight against human flourishing. In pain, we eat from the ground until we return to it.

Distress doesn't only arise from a closer look at nature, however. Consider what happens when your people take a closer look at what humanity has done to their natural world. The statistics are staggering: roughly 805 million people are undernourished in the world (that would be a line of people encircling the globe 13 times); over 50 percent of people do not have an adequate supply of water; three species of plant or animal life become extinct every day; 25 million acres of tropical forest are destroyed every year (roughly the size of Indiana); a convoy of garbage trucks carrying only one year's worth of garbage from the United States alone would encircle the globe 3.8 times; and this is not to mention matters of energy consumption, air pollution, and a host of other ecological difficulties. **1**

When God's people begin to care for creation, they suddenly face sobering statistics and sense the insignificance of their local efforts when faced with large-scale patterns of consumption and profitable corporate industries that both inspire and satisfy those consumer desires. It is easy for a Christian to move from being in awe with the wonder of God's creation (sermon 2) to seeking to live in caring consumption (sermon 3) to suddenly feeling angry or depressed, suffering from compassion fatigue. **2** Many disciples get lost in that gap between the simplicity of our individual efforts and the complexity of the world's ecological problems. Care for creation becomes a program they try and find too taxing, not a way of life that God has given them in Christ.

For that reason, this last sermon in the series seeks to foster a larger spiritual vision for God's people, a vision that will sustain them in the midst of the painful realities of our ecological situation. This vision is anchored in Paul's words to the Roman Christians. In Romans 8, Paul depicts life in the Spirit. Yet, he does not focus upon a disembodied experience, a movement from physical to spiritual, from body to soul, from earth to heaven. Instead, Paul grounds the spiritual life in the experience of a very physical hope: hope for the redemption of our bodies and for the release of creation from its bondage to decay. Paul's vision has two qualities to it that are helpful for Christians engaged in ecological efforts and conversation.

First, Paul is honest about the suffering of creation. Echoing language from the psalms and prophets, Paul listens to the voices of creation. Only instead of unmitigated praise, Paul hears groaning. Creation cries in eager anticipation for the return of Christ, the revelation of the sons of God, the dawn of a new creation when the created world will finally be released from its bondage to futility that occurred as a result of the fall. With that in mind, Christians are able to face the horrors of creation's bondage with sobering honesty. When seeing such things, they are led to repentance. They model for others how individuals mourn their fall from God's good design, confess their sins, and turn to God for forgiveness and gracious redirection in manifesting his good design in this fallen world.

Second, this repentance is joined to hope. As Paul listens to the groans of creation, he hears not only cries of suffering but also cries of expectation: he calls these groans the pains of childbirth that anticipate new life. Christians join creation in this eager hope. We long for the redemption of our bodies and the dawn of the new creation. Our efforts in caring for

creation, then, are not silenced by the horrors of ecological disaster. They are not diminished to despair by the complexity of the world. They are not fueled by trust in our technological progress. Rather they are driven by hope. Hope in our risen Lord who now rules over all things and promises to return, raise our physical bodies, and bring about a new creation. In eager anticipation of that new creation, we live in a repentant hope, confessing our sin and caring for God's gift of this broken beautiful world.

The closing sermon of this series, therefore, seeks to strengthen Christians for the life-long task of caring for God's world. It anchors that strength in our risen Savior and his promise to bring about a new creation and encourages God's people to manifest that strength in lives of repentant hope. Though the suffering of creation is overwhelming, the Christian can face it soberly and honestly: we repent of sin and yet do not despair, because we have a sure and certain glorious hope that strengthens our service until our Savior returns. **3**

Sermon Formation

Focus	Christ will bring about a new creation.
Function	that the hearers may live in repentant hope. As God's people, we are mindful of our sin and repent of the damage that we cause to creation but we are also mindful of God's grace and care for creation in repentant hope of the restoration of all things.
Malady	we can sometimes tune out the world around us and live detached from creation, immersed in a world of our own technological creation. When God awakens us to the reality of our lives as his creatures in community with his larger creation, our lives can be overwhelmed with the horror of what we discover. Rather than repent of our sin and seek to live in a faithful responsible care for creation, we get angry or we suffer from compassion fatigue, fall into despair, and give up hope.
Means	in death, Christ freed us from our sin and in his resurrection he brings us a glorious hope of a new creation. He is the first fruits of the new creation, the risen Gardener who has come to care for his world. Because of his resurrection, ascension, and rule over all things, we join creation in an expectant hope of the redemption of our bodies and the release of creation from its bondage to corruption.
	the sermon uses a thematic structure to lead the hearers through the logic of Paul's text. 4
Structure	Paul's argument in Romans immerses us in the world where we hear the groans of creation, discover the rule of our resurrected Lord, and live in repentant hope. Using a thematic structure of cause-effect, 5 the sermon will treat each of these ideas in a separate section. For each section, the hearers will consider how this teaching is anchored in the text and then applied in their lives. The sermon thus leads hearers through this theological teaching by proclaiming how it is based on the text and then applied in their lives.

Section Footnotes

1. These and other statistics are available in Steven Bouma-Prediger's sobering chapter on the state of the planet, "What's Wrong with the World," in Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 23-55.
2. For more on compassion fatigue, see <http://www.compassionfatigue.org/index.html> (<http://www.compassionfatigue.org/index.html>). Accessed August 15, 2013.
3. For a theological elaboration on the restoration of all things in the new creation, see Charles Arand's work in *Together with All Creatures: Caring for God's Living Earth. A Report of the Commission of Theology and Church Relations. The Lutheran Church "Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: CPH, 2010), 36-38.
4. For a description of thematic preaching, see the information posted at *The Pulpit* on concordiatheology.org. See <http://concordiatheology.org/sermon-structs/thematic/> (<http://concordiatheology.org/sermon-structs/thematic/>).
5. For a description of this specific structure, see <http://concordiatheology.org/sermon-structs/thematic/causeeffect/> (<http://concordiatheology.org/sermon-structs/thematic/causeeffect/>).