
If This Is What God Is Up To, Then ...

TEXT:
Romans 8:18–25

April 24, 2005

Unless we had taken time to read from Chapter 1 of Romans, it would be difficult to recognize that here in Chapter 8, Paul introduces a new word in this letter: creation.¹ *Ktisis* is the Greek word translated “creation.” Paul has been speaking of redemption and then all of a sudden, five times in as many verses, Paul mentions creation — *ktisis*. In these verses, Paul draws back the curtain to reveal that the object of God’s redemptive work is the whole of creation.

I have a friend, Kirk, who rides his bike to work. If you ask him why he chooses to ride his bike, he will tell you that he likes the out-of-doors. He will tell you that its good exercise; “and think of the money I save on gas,” he says. But let him talk about it long enough, and he will tell you that he rides his bike to work because of his faith in Jesus Christ. This is not a common testimony, but it is what Kirk will say.

I don’t know what he thinks about while he is riding his bike, but he could think about this surprising passage from Romans 8. I say surprising because five

times in five verses, Paul mentions creation. Now it is not surprising for the scriptures to speak of God as creator. That is not surprising at all. But here Paul is not speaking of God as creator so much as God as redeemer. This is a conversation about redemption; about God’s commitment to repair that which is broken. It is a surprising passage because Paul emphatically declares that the object of God’s work of redemption is the whole of creation.

Well, I don’t know what you think about that. It’s not easy to think about God’s redemptive purposes reaching beyond the human creature to include every creature. Or as Dr. Bob has said, “God’s redemption is for the earth as well as the earthling.”²

But it makes me wonder: If God’s desire is to repair not simply the human soul, but the whole creation, then what does that mean for the church? How does God’s love for the whole world reshape our living as the church? If this is what God is up to, then what should we be up to?

I think that may be why Kirk rides his bike to work. It is one simple way to practice a life that preserves and respects

that which belongs to God and that which is loved by God beyond the self. I respect him for that. I don’t ride my bike to work. I’m not suggesting that everyone who believes in Jesus needs to ride their bike to work. What I am suggesting is that lifestyle choices that preserve and respect the whole of creation beyond ourselves are consistent with the Gospel. Perhaps the most important reason to engage in such choices is because the object of God’s work of redemption is the whole of creation.

It’s springtime. I’m announcing that because temperatures in the 30s at the end of April seem to me to be an abomination to the living God, and I’m trying to talk them away. I have noticed that one thing constant about springtime in every city in which we have lived is that those who have been inside emerge and are drawn to the dirt in their yard. They can be seen pruning and digging and planting and digging and watering and digging.

This to me is a strange practice. I’m not much on yard work. Our yard has often revealed my rather casual relationship with yard work. And in the providence of God, we

have always lived near those who believe that the chief end of life is to work in the yard. The Ares and our next-door neighbors have been able to provide a before and after picture.

The most extreme circumstance of this was in Columbia, South Carolina, where Carol and I lived next to Rick and Joan. He cut the grass, but not much else. But she was passionate about yard work. She was in the yard all the time, sweeping the driveway, vacuuming the yard, combing the blades of grass all in the same direction. In the fall, when the leaves would fall, Joan would be on the porch with a rake and a trash bag, catching them on the way down. Most of the leaves never touched the ground.

There was one job that was Rick's, and he complained about it bitterly. I found Rick transplanting the azalea bushes. I said, "That looks like hard work." "I'll never do this again," he said. "This is the last time. I'm putting my foot down!" "You've transplanted them before?" I asked. "Every year two or three of them have to be moved somewhere else. But it's not my idea. It's Joan's idea."

I said, "Those azaleas sure will look good there near the side fence." He said: "They looked just as good near the front door. Most people plant their bushes and leave them there, you know, but not Joan. She's got to move them every year. But this is the last year. I

told her, 'Next year, just find a yard you like, and we will buy the house. I'm not moving another azalea.'" The next spring, he moved a few red azaleas back near the front door and a few white ones over by the driveway.

Love does that. Oh, it may not have sounded like love to you, but that is exactly what it was. If she wanted those bushes planted in the living room, he would have done it. We find ourselves doing things that we might not choose for ourselves, but we can't help doing it because it matters to those we love.

I guess that's why the Christian Church is growing in our care for the earth. If God's redemptive care includes the whole of creation, then shouldn't the life of the church reflect that care?

The problem with living as a steward of the earth is that no one person can do it. It's overwhelming. You would have to think about energy consumption, and the food you eat, and transportation, and global warming. I know some folks don't care at all, and some folks talk as if nothing else matters, but they would argue that our generation is consuming nonrenewable resources at a pace never seen before and at a pace that can hardly be described as loving the creation that God loves.

So what do we do? Well, there's not just one answer to that. But I am sure this is why Kirk rides his bike to work. My friend Matt plants a tree every

spring. There are some who bring plastic dishes to the church suppers just to reduce the use of Styrofoam. Martha carries her own cloth bag to the grocery store, so when they ask "Paper or plastic?" she says, "No thanks, I'll just put them in here." My friend Roger takes his kids camping to make sure they develop respect for the beautiful and fragile world in which we live.

Paul says time and again, it's the *ktisis*, the creation, the whole creation, that is the object of God's care. I don't know that this perspective dictates a particular way of living, but I do believe it gives reason to live differently, to make choices, to live in a fashion that respects and preserves that which belongs to God beyond ourselves.

Raney grew up in the small north Georgia town of Bethel. She was engaged to be married to Charles Shepherd, who was an Episcopalian from the big city of Atlanta. Charles' mother was meeting the family, and she went to lunch with Raney, Raney's mother, Aunt Naomi and Aunt Flossie. It was there, at the K&W Cafeteria, that they learned that Mrs. Shepherd was, as Raney describes it, "of all things, a vegetarian."

"I got meatloaf," Raney said. "Mama got meatloaf because they have wonderful meatloaf that's not too bready at the K&W, Aunt Naomi got turkey, Aunt Flossie got roast beef, and Mrs. Shepherd from Atlanta got a vegetable plate." "I've stopped eating meat," she

said. We all looked at her. “I got involved in a group in Atlanta which was putting together programs on simple living, and after a few programs, I became convinced that being a vegetarian — me, that is — made sense. Somehow, I thought people were *born* vegetarians. I never thought about somebody just *changing over*.”³

I think that is why Paul all of a sudden introduces this new word, *ktisis*: because Paul wants us to think about changing over in some way; living in some fashion; making some decision; engaging in some act that reflects that the object of God’s love is the whole of creation — not the human soul alone, but everything into which God has breathed life. You may have thought that people were just born that way. But Paul makes it clear, no one is. We all have to change over.

So if the object of God’s redemptive care is the whole of creation, and this is what God is up to, then how do you suppose the church should live?

¹Creation is referred to twice in Chapter 1, and then not again until 8:19f.

²Dr. Robert Meneilly, longtime and beloved pastor of Village Presbyterian Church, *Saving God’s Good Earth*, preached at Village June 14, 1992. Many at Village continue to remember this sermon.

³Clyde Edgerton, *Raney* (1985), p. 4

This sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church’s Web site: www.villagepres.org/sermons.

**This sermon delivered by
The Rev. Tom Are, Jr., at
Village Presbyterian Church
6641 Mission Road
Prairie Village, KS 66208**