

Creation Care 2016

Paul Versluis (May 8, 2016)

When I was growing up, I lived my first 7 years on a farm. Pete and Tina Versluis had 9 children and his bother Paul and Nelly Versluis, my grandparents had 8. They all lived just across the road from each other and they farmed the land side by side. They call the farm Island Farm and it is still owned and farmed by my cousins today.

One of my cherished memories is planting tomato seeds with my grandfather in the greenhouse, the smell of peat and wood smoke, and then later planting the tomatoes plants in the field, Billy the work horse pulling us on a small planting wagon, I would put in a plant in the plowed furrow and Grandpa would put in a plant, and just a bit of water to boot.

Growing up on the farm but I didn't know the earth was sacred. We sprayed chemicals on the orchards, we drained the wetlands, we dug large holes and filled them with our junk. If a cow misbehaved, it would be kicked. I was taught to worship the creator but not creation. The soil, the trees, the plants and the animals, the water, wind and air, even women and children were all under dominion. We would preserve the soul but not the natural world because we thought God was going to destroy the world.

Mennonite farmers were not so different. Mennonite theologian Walter Klaassen writes, "despite a commitment to nonviolence, Mennonites...have done no thinking about nonviolence toward the Earth and 'are by no means in the Christian front ranks of creation care.'" Calvin Redekop, [father of Ben] agrees stating, "there is absolutely no reference to the preservation of the earth in Mennonite theology." [Creation and Environment, Redekop ed., pg184]

And then slowly we changed and repented. We came to think of Creation as a sacred trust that revealed God's glory. Within two generations we moved from a more destructive and manipulative of the earth towards an intimacy with the earth. We began a recovery, in both farming and theology where we could once again would be able to hear and see God in not just the little book of the bible but also in the big book of creation.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was a Jesuit Priest and scientist. He taught the more deeply we give ourselves to the earth the more deeply we give ourselves to God. Planting, harvest, farmers markets, composting, gardening, recycling, these are spiritual disciplines, sacred actions. Listening to the wind and the rain, hiking in the mountains, animal companions, birds and flowers, these are sacred actions and beings that awaken us to the heart beat of God.

God's command to love extends to creation. Showing care and reverence to the earth is a way of showing care and reverence to God. We now understand that our Anabaptist core principles of non-violence, simplicity, community, peacemaking and restorative justice include creation. In this green cathedral, intimacy with creation can lead us to intimacy with God as we experience the glory of God in the natural world.