

**Centre Congregational Church, U.C.C.
Sunday Morning Service, 10:00am
April 23, 2023
The Rev Dr Scott Couper
Third Sunday after Easter
EARTH DAY**

**“When Will We Recognize and Understand?”
Christian Scripture: Luke 24:13-35**



Credit: Eastern Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church

<https://youtu.be/-8NFhh9KMHA>

Best of BBC Planet Earth HD, Kamil Bartolewski, “Morning Sun”

Happy Earth Day, friends! I pray you enjoyed the inspirational images set to music presented by the BBC. I am sure that our church, with Jenifer’s help, could easily produce a similar presentation next year. Margit can send us some footage of a bear tearing down her bird feeder. I can send a video of a groundhog

munching lettuce on my patio. I know the Pu's could send some videos of birds in their beautiful garden. Bonnie has a bunch of bees and butterflies outside her home at Morningside. I have recently seen deer by Nancy and Milton's place on Upper Dummerston Road. And with Marion Daley and the Svec living at the edge of the Earth in Putney, I am sure there is an Eagle or two flying about.

We do not really need the BBC to show us how beautiful our world is. We can see how beautiful it is right here in the greater Brattleboro area. Our landscapes are beautiful. Mt Wantastiquet looms in front of me every morning. We can walk along the rushing waters of the West River or along the more voluminous flow of the Connecticut. We have beautiful fields, creeks, and waterfalls. All we need to do is go to that OTHER STATE to be enchanted by the beauty of Lake Spofford and Kilburn Pond. And even if you are not able to hike out and about, have a beverage and watch the sunset over the lagoon every weekend at The Marina. I thank God for our Earth, its diversity, and the beauty therein.

Being a moderate, politically, I have always been distressed that the one issue on which I would think both conservatives and progressives could agree, the preservation and protection of our environment, is a source of contestation. It was during the administration of a *Republican* president, Ulysses Grant, that the national park system was established in 1872 with the signing of a bill designating 2.2 million acres of land as "a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and

enjoyment of the people".¹ That park is 'Yellowstone'. And it was another *Republican* president, Theodore Roosevelt, often called "the conservation president," who doubled the number of sites within the National Park system. As President from 1901 to 1909, he signed legislation establishing five new national parks".²

I find it ironic that so-called 'conservatives' are not the most outspoken protectors of the environment. The term 'conservative' can and should be a designation worn as a badge of honor if it could be associated with *conserving*, or protecting, the environment. You would think, intuitively, that it would be progressives who would wish to *progress*, move forward, advance, boldly carry-on a march into modernity, and sacrifice the environment that has existed naturally for over three billion years until the advent of humans.³ I know this curious ideological flip-flop is caused by aversion to government and a politic motivated by a craving for perpetual growth, the maximization of profit, and an insatiable

¹ National Park Service, "Origin of the National Park Idea", found at: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/nps-history-origins.htm#:~:text=Congress%20approved%20the%20legislation%20in,and%20enjoyment%20of%20the%20people.%22>, accessed April 23, 2023.

² National Park Service, "Theodore Roosevelt and the National Park System", found at: <https://www.nps.gov/thrb/learn/historyculture/trandthenpsystem.htm>, accessed April 23, 2023.

³ NEO Basics, "Life on Earth", found at: https://cneos.jpl.nasa.gov/about/life_on_earth.html#:~:text=Life%20on%20Earth%20began%20at,period%20of%20late%20heavy%20bombardment., accessed April 23, 2023.

And humans only really began affecting the environment since the Industrial Revolution that began in about 1760.

accumulation of capital. Nonetheless, I still believe it is the protection of the environment over which conservatives and progressives could and should unite in solidarity.

I believe it is our polemical media that causes good conservatives and good progressives to oppose one another on simple logical common-sense policies such as masking during a pandemic, gun control (not banning) in the midst of daily carnage, and the protection of the environment. *The Guardian* revealed that the United States is averaging one chemical accident every two days. “Train derailments, truck crashes, pipeline ruptures, or industrial plant leaks and spills – are happening consistently across the country [...] In the first seven weeks of 2023 alone, there were more than 30 incidents recorded”.⁴ One need not be a so-called ‘progressive’ or ‘conservative’ to realize that the demonization of the Environmental Protection Agency and the deregulation of industry in the United States leads to the increasing poisoning of our Earth and its citizens.

Our scriptures teach us that humans are curious creatures. We tend to practice what psychologists term ‘cognitive dissonance’. “Cognitive dissonance Theory postulates that an underlying psychological tension is created when an individual’s behavior is inconsistent with his or her thoughts and beliefs. This

⁴ “Revealed: The US Is Averaging One Chemical Accident Every Two Days”, *The Guardian*, March 2, 2023, found at: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/feb/25/revealed-us-chemical-accidents-one-every-two-days-average>, accessed April 23, 2023.

underlying tension then motivates an individual to make an attitude change that would produce consistency between thoughts and behaviors.”⁵

In our scripture this morning, Jesus castigates his two disciples for their cognitive dissonance. They are mopey; they are depressed; they are devastated; they have lost hope; they are fleeing Jerusalem in retreat despite the fact that it was the beginning of a promising new era. The disciples had heard since their youth the ancient prophets’ teachings many times before and Jesus had told them what was to happen to him - that he would suffer and live again. Yet their behavior reflected tragedy. Jesus lamented, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe that all the prophets declared” (Luke 24:25)! The disciples’ cognitive dissonance was so extreme that they did not even recognize Jesus, for miles, while he reviewed with them again by “opening the scriptures”, teaching them again that which they had already been taught (Luke 24:32). It was only in the blessing and breaking of the bread that their cognitive dissonance was shattered: “their eyes opened, and they recognized him” (Luke 24:31).⁶

⁵ J.K. Thompson, [...] and J.E. Menzel, “Internalization of Thin – Ideal and Muscular – Ideal” in *Encyclopedia of Body Image and Human Appearance*, 2012, in Science Direct and ‘Cognitive Dissonance Theory’, found at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/cognitive-dissonance-theory>, accessed April 23, 2023.

⁶ This failure to recognize Jesus for a two-hour walk demonstrates again that there is biblical evidence that the resurrection appearances were *not* necessarily physical. More evidence follows when Jesus “disappeared” from their sight (Luke 24:31). The original Greek states that Jesus “invisible became from them”.

The story of the walk to Emmaus communicates to us the depths of God's creative power. The story of Jesus' resurrection is the genesis of a new creation that gave life and energy to the disciples and gives to us! Though the passage begins with depression and cognitive dissonance, it ends with clarity, enthusiasm, joy, and purpose.

This Earth Day, let us live as who we are: Resurrection People! "Let's allow God's creative energy, which raised Jesus from the grave, to fill and empower us to affirm and spread life and creative power in the world of our fellow-creatures, all of whom are *also* loved by God – so that Earth Day, and every day, can be an Easter story of the life and love of Jesus shared by us all".⁷

This was the word of God, and it was preached to the people of God, and the people of God responded, "Amen".

⁷ *Pastor's Postings*, in Our Life Together at Christ's Disciples at St. Paul's, Calgary, "A Reflection on Emmaus and Earth Day", April 24, 2012. Found at: <https://pastorfergus.wordpress.com/2012/04/24/a-reflection-on-emmaus-and-earth-day/>, accessed April 23, 2023.