

Rev. Cornel Barnett, D. Min.  
Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
Larkspur, California  
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Genesis 1:9-10, 20-25; Psalm 104:24-26;  
Psalm 96: 1-4a, 6, 10-13; Romans 8:22-28  
“Let the Earth Rejoice”

My last three sermons at Redwoods carried messages I wanted emphasized in my last months before I retired from fulltime ministry. The first was theological in that it spoke about “God.” The second was ecclesiastical in that it focused on the “church.” The third was missiological. It addressed global mission. Today, my final sermon of my 31 years in installed ministry addresses a subject dear to my heart: the ocean. In broader context, it speaks about environmental justice.

I’m doing so because of my love for the ocean. Suellen and I attend annually the San Francisco International Ocean Film Festival. Stan Teng, who is on the screening committee for the festival, is here today. I appreciate his presence as I do members of this church and my friends from former churches I’ve served in the Bay Area, members of other church-related entities and my family (Suellen, Anna, Alan and David) and my neighbors and other friends.

Many of us have enjoyed walks on the beach, we have looked seaward and meditated, and we have tasted the ocean’s bounty, played in her waters, swam and surfed, sailed and traveled its wide expanse.

The ocean has been my playground for most of my life. I participate primarily as a surfer and swimmer. I have surfed in many beautiful environments and caught many amazing waves.

I have experienced the very good and the bad and the ugly. In my teen years, I had a “bad” experience in a visit to a remote surfing beach on the northern Natal coast in South Africa. I walked through knee high white foam to enter the ocean. I did not think much about it until later in the day when I itched all over. Unbeknown to me, a factory was spilling effluent into a nearby river, which washed into the sea.

“Ugly” was a visit to a Staten Island, New York's north shore beach. Trash from the East and Hudson rivers dumped onto the island. The beach was blanketed with syringes, plastic containers, wood from construction sites, everything. When a wave heaved up one could see thick garbage in the wave face. It was a nightmare! I heard recently that fracking is causing the release of inflammable methane gas into the Hudson River. I also heard that they are cleaning up the beaches.

The ocean film festival takes us to tropical coral reefs with their outstanding displays of color. Orcas; whales, sharks, stingrays, squid and millions of fish grace the screen. Swimmers, environmentalists, boaters and fishers engage in brilliant feats of daring and courage.

The festival also takes us to the dark side: ocean acidification, bleaching coral reefs, shark catches where sharks are caught by the thousands only for their fins and their finless bodies thrown back into the sea, overfishing, enslavement of boat fisherman, plastic gyres, etc., but every segment comes with ways to advocate for positive change.

Scripture foresees a hurting earth. The living oceans (and the land) have been exploited for generations. They have not been honored as one of God's gifts. We have consumed without regard, dumped what we no longer needed, and physically altered the marine environment.

Paul writes, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves . . ." There is an interconnectedness of wholeness and health between human beings and the earth. If nature goes down, we go down with it. Conversely, if nature is healthy we are healthy.

Genesis speaks of God's creation as "good." The church confesses that, "In sovereign love God created the world good." (The Brief Statement of Faith, *Book of Confessions* of the PCUSA). This applies to every aspect of the sea, its teeming life, vibrant coral reefs and beauty.

And, as God's stewards, we are called not only to enjoy the oceans, but also to care for them as a *sacred* gift. Because we are people of faith, hope and love with deep connections with each other and the earth, we are to maintain the bounty of the oceans' waters and the integrity of oceanic systems that contain beauty and support an abundance of life. We all share the responsibility to be good stewards of God's oceans.

How? We know the litany.

We can recycle or dispose of trash properly.

We can reduce energy consumption and encourage renewable and sustainable sources of energy.

- Whenever I drive to Marin and pass the Chevron Refinery in Richmond, I am grateful that they provide gas for my car but I'm going to work for renewal energy until the day I die.
- The labels on my shirts collectively represent the United Nations, including "Made in the USA" (my Green Festival t-shirt), and most shirts, I suspect, are made in sweat shops and yet I shall continue to work for fair labor practices

abroad and work on changing my wardrobe, although I don't intend to purchase many clothes in the future.

- I appreciate a military that keeps us safe from those countries that will gladly attack us but I will continue to my dying breath to work for a world without war.

I digress.

We can reduce the use of pesticides and fertilizers.

We can enjoy responsible recreation at the beach, on the water and in our parks.

We can contact policy-makers at every level. We can advocate for the Endangered Species Act, for better animal welfare standards in the food industry, for laws that prevent seafood fraud and combat over-fishing, and for conservation of habitats, and more.

Today, more than ever, we understand the interconnectedness of all life and the disruptive impact humankind can have on this balance. As we gain an ever-deeper awareness of the connections between our activities on the land and the health of marine ecosystems, we also gain an understanding of how we can collaborate with God in the restoration and healing of creation.

A shout out to advocates like The Ocean Conservancy and The Nature Conservancy and our member employees and stewards in the latter, the Rademachers! Also, an affirmation to members of this church, John and Tani Girton: John is a green investor and Tani is breaking the glass ceiling in the world of executive banking.

Needless to say, global warming is having an adverse effect on our beautiful planet and marine ecosystems. We must act on all the knowledge we have in order to protect our oceans and seas to not only preserve God's creation but also so that future generations will be able to enjoy clean beaches, healthy seafood, abundant ocean wildlife, healthy coral reefs and thriving coastal communities.

Many people around the world are waking up to the possibilities of a better world. Everywhere we look people on the ground and governments are concerned and co-creating with God, as we see it, for the creation, recreation and renewal of God's world.

Yesterday's San Francisco Chronicle carried a "Nation" article focusing on Hawaii. The headline read, "Obama creates world's largest ocean sanctuary." It's more than twice the size of Texas! This serves both a political legacy and a conservation benefit. Barbara Boxer is featured in the same newspaper for her work to prevent portions of the green enclave at the foot of the Golden Gate Bridge at the Presidio from being sold to developers. UN climate change conferences plug away in their struggle to maintain strong global economies while saving the environment with catch words like, "mitigation and adaptation."

Psalm 96 has these wonderful images of the earth rejoicing. The Psalmist writes, "Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy." Let this indeed happen as a result of our work for environmental justice and activities for peace, compassion and justice everywhere.

Thank you all for accompanying me on my journey of faith, thank you for being here today, and God bless you as you continue to care for yourselves and your churches and communities and all areas for peace and loving justice. Please join me in the party/reception in the fellowship hall immediately after the service where I'd like to acknowledge your presence here and thank you personally. Amen. Amen and Amen!