

*Lord, open our ears to hear your Word spoken to us; Open our hearts to be changed by Your Spirit. Amen.*

This week's Gospel reading with Jesus' admonition that

*"those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."* invited me to a little wordplay for this third week in our series on Celebrating Creation.

If we choose to *live like we care* (the topic of week 1)

in order to *heal our earth* (last week's theme)...

we will have to be willing to *lose our lifestyle* (the third) – or at least dial back our addiction to three "c's" – convenience, comfort and consumption.

What might Jesus' teaching that we must *"lose our life for the sake of the gospel in order to save it"* might mean when it comes to saving our planet?

Being a disciple of Jesus and a lover of God includes caring for the creation

God made, especially when it has been damaged almost beyond repair by human over-consumption and practices that degrade the earth, its habitats and creatures.

In 1993 former Vice President Al Gore published *Earth in the Balance:*

*Ecology and the Human Spirit*, which sounded the alarm on environmental devastation and the threats of climate change.

The thesis, as I recall, was that humanity, at least most Western societies,

was deep into a cycle of addiction: over-consumption leading to the damage, and denial of the damage leading to more consumption to push down the feelings about the damage... that's what addiction is.

We rely on substances or behaviors to help us not feel certain feelings,

and after awhile, we become dependent on them.

We can argue about whether we are addicted to over-consuming, to comfort,

to convenience, but they certainly seem to me to be at the heart of the issue.

These happen also to be things that impede our commitment to following Jesus.

There is nothing convenient or comfortable about being a disciple of Jesus,

and he invites us into a life of giving, not consuming.

Let's take a look at where these values hold us back, as citizens of earth

and as followers of Jesus.

Convenience – so much of the garbage choking our planets waterways and wildlife is a consequence of our addiction to convenience –

- ◆ fast food and its packaging;
- ◆ online ordering and its packaging and use of fossil fuels;
- ◆ processed foods with their high chemical content;
- ◆ paper towels and disposable wipes for the spills we can't take an extra five minutes to clean with reusable sponges – these are just a few examples.

Where does convenience drive your consumption and increasing your trash volume? Where might we can cut back or change our patterns so we can reduce, reuse, recycle even if it takes a little longer and a little more effort? Can we take the time to do the dishes here and cut down on disposables? What can we teach our children and grandchildren?

And where does our love of convenience get in the way of our life in Christ? Do we choose not to participate in certain aspects of church life because they're out of the way, at inconvenient times? Some of the outreach we could do we don't because no one wants to leave home or routine to add it in.

But Jesus didn't say, "Feed the hungry and clothe the naked if it works with your schedule. Help the poor and marginalized if it's convenient," did he?

I am so locked in to my routines and rhythms of work, I can see a phone call as inconvenient – let alone having my car engine malfunction this week and needing to put a whole afternoon's workload on hold.

Yet in that I received so many blessings – a ride from Leonardtown to Newburg, a car freely offered me, a ride to upper Waldorf to pick mine up.

Here's a question I want to start asking more often:

What might I let God give me if I lay aside my love of convenience?

Comfort – We Americans are increasingly addicted to living in a very narrow temperature range – too cold in the summers and too warm in the winters. Feeding this addiction to total comfort all the time contributes directly to the overheating of our planet, to extreme heat and weather that is making life untenable for many of the rest of the planet's residents and wildlife.

This narrow comfort range is also unhealthy, causing our bodies to become less adaptable, less resilient.

Thinking of our world's climate, where might we compromise our desire for "comfort" for the sake of the rest of the world?

And where is our addiction to comfort getting in the way of following Jesus? Here we think less of physical comfort and more about social comfort.

I've had so many people say,

"I could never talk about my faith with others – it's just not comfortable."

It's not something we're culturally conditioned to do – but Jesus didn't say,

"Go and make disciples of all nations if you feel like it. Go and proclaim the good news to the poor and the sick if you already know them."

Here's a radical thought: Is there room for God in your comfort zone?

I would assert that Jesus would laugh at the very term "comfort zone."

He was constantly pushing himself and his followers way out of theirs.

Maybe if we can loosen up on our love of comfort, physical, social, spiritual, we might find more vitality in our church life.

And then there's consumption – so much of our climate crisis has been driven by our insatiable desire for more stuff, more food, more drink.

Consumption drives us to mine precious metals at great cost to the habitats around them, to torture and slaughter chickens, pigs, cows and other animals, to over-fish our oceans, over-farm our land...

just think of the implications of our lust for a certain kind of avocado,

which has fueled cartel violence and the degradation of soil and landscape.

The diet and exercise industries are multi-billion dollar enterprises – because we over-consume and it's killing us.

"Give us today our daily bread." What if we learned to eat that way?

Can we train ourselves to eat locally sourced foods and

become more moderate in our appetites? To consume less and move more?

To consume enough but not excess, and focus on ensuring there is enough for everyone else in the world? Just that focus would make us better disciples.

I love what has happened this summer with our gardens – so many of you are bringing your excess up to the Community Fridge, or sharing at church.

That's living the Gospel; that's living the spirit of honoring the land and what it gives us.

I love this quote from our first reading this morning:

*Losing one's life for the gospel is not a call for meaningless sacrifice or abuse.*

*Rather, it is a reminder to "come and see" (John 1:39) from God's creation that resurrection is vegetal.*

Resurrection is vegetal – the plants around us show us the way of dying and rising, or growing in order to give all of yourself away.

This sermon has been a little long on judgment – but so were the prophets.  
Jesus was not gentle in his message to his followers.  
No one wants to hear about losing their life – but we just may  
loosen up our lifestyle to make room for others to thrive.  
To make room for the rest of the planet to thrive.

What if we tweaked Jesus' words:

*He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them,  
'If any want to **heal this earth God has given us,**  
let them deny themselves and take up their **care for creation** and follow me.  
For those who want to save their **lifestyle** will lose it,  
and those who lose their **lifestyle** for my sake,  
and for the sake of **my creation**, will save it.  
For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?*

It is our lives in the balance, my friends –  
and certainly the lives of our grandchildren at risk of being left a planet that  
can no longer sustain human life.  
If that doesn't get us moving, what will?

**Amen.**

Live like we care to heal our earth means losing our life(style) for our children, so we can restore balance.

**Mark 7:31-37**

Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee. Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

**Reading on Care for Creation**      The Rev. Dr. Dong Hyeon Jeong, Methodist pastor and professor of New Testament Interpretation at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary

I love gardening. Touching the soil, seeing and smelling the plants, and eating the fruits of their love teach me every time to be receptive to the presence of the vegetal life. Moreover, recently I have also learned about the importance of accepting decay or death. As a human being, I am fearful of my own death because, as a Christian, I have one life to live with a clear expiration in sight. And yet, plants teach me that decay/death is not the end. They grow their leaves during spring, blossom their flowers during summer, lay down their leaves during the fall, and accept the slumber during winter. Then they rise again as the spring season awakens...

Losing one's life for the gospel is not a call for meaningless sacrifice or abuse. Rather, it is a reminder to "come and see" (John 1:39) from God's creation that resurrection is vegetal. We live and die in Christ because, like the plants, we believe in Christ's promise of renewed life. This renewed life recognizes the joys and pains of the olden days, the deaths that we have had in the past, while believing that we will see the rays of divine light and the joys of the blessed rain in our lives. In all of these, we are invited once again to let go of all of ourselves so we can be buried and be resurrected in Christ.