

Everything is Connected:

An Episcopalian Perspective

Rt. Rev. Eugene Taylor Sutton

In Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, the spiritual teacher Father Zosima speaks of the interconnectedness of all life:

"All is like an ocean, all flows and connects; touch it in one place and it echos at the other end of the world... Love all of God's creation, both the whole of it and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love plants, love each thing. If you love each thing, you will perceive the mystery of God in all things."



The Rt. **Reverend Eugene Taylor Sutton**, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland.

That spiritual wisdom is what lifts Christians to care for all of God's creations. It is what moved St. Francis of Assisi to compose his great canticle celebrating "Brother Sun and Sister Moon" and a host of other creatures. It has compelled the world's greatest spiritual leaders from Christian mystics to Mahatma Gandhi to the Dalai Lama to Archbishop Desmond Tutu to believe in God's universal love that knows no bounds of race or faith or nation – or even of species. Scientists now tell us that nature participates in a seamless web of connection; it is actually possible that the flap of a butterfly wing in Japan can set off a hurricane in the Caribbean. And the driving of a gas guzzler in the United States can melt an iceberg in Greenland.

For many people of faith, we begin our thinking about our life on this planet with the simple affirmation of Psalm 24: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." This is God's world first, and we are given the task of taking care of what God has made. The holy Scriptures paint a picture for us of an interconnected world where there is enough for everyone. There are enough resources, enough food and water, for everyone – but only if we take our place as stewards of the creation. God creates and loves the whole world of oceans and rocks, plants and animals, and human beings are created to be part of that great harmony.

Everything is connected.

And that is why this present moment in human history is so perilous, because the earth is warming at an alarming rate. All but a very few skeptics are convinced that the polluting of our planet will only get worse as new economies in the developing world strive to achieve the standard of living enjoyed by many in the U.S. We are already seeing ominous consequences – melting ice caps, glaciers shrinking at an increasingly fast rate, intensifying storms and droughts, rising coastal waters....

New reports trickle out in the news almost every day of water supplies, animal species, and habitats at risk. But so far, it is still by and large business as usual in this country. Climate change isn't a major issue on the talk shows about crises our political leaders should address now. It ranks far down the list of American's concerns in the polls.

Near the top of that list of concerns is a fear of terrorism. We know what a terrorist attack looks like. It's natural to see it as something which it is our job to stop, and to see ourselves as a force for good. But climate change is a far more dangerous threat, killing more people by far than terrorist attacks – only these victims are dying from drought or storms or rising waters or spreading disease, which do their damage in ways hard to measure. And the big difference is that unlike being a terrorist, we don't have to commit evil in order to contribute to the destructive evil of global warming. All we need to do is to keep on doing as we are doing now. It's far easier to focus on evil terrorists "out there" than on ourselves and on the damage we are doing by denial and avoidance.

It seems that there are two great issues the human race must face if it is ultimately to survive and thrive. The first is this: can we learn to deal with our differences without turning to violence and war?

And the second is: can we muster the vision and courage to stop the destruction of the earth before it is too late?

All of the religious faiths – including my own, the Christian tradition – have often made the mistake of narrowing their focus only on the need for personal salvation and the promise of a blissful afterlife. Too many people believe that "My faith is about me and my own well-being and private spiritual life, and above all about my going to heaven." But our Scriptures tell us differently. When asked "what was the greatest commandment of all", Jesus gave a summary of all that he taught, quoting ancient wisdom, saying, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

We call this teaching the Summary of the Law. Yet how can we say that we love our neighbors if we by our actions and inactions regarding environmental destruction, are killing them? Ultimately, then, as people of faith, we are not here this morning solely for ourselves, nor for economic or political reasons. We are here because we *love*.