

Sunday 16 2010 C

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

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Occasional

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

Have you ever heard the expression that, *A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step*? It is one of the greatest insights that I've ever heard. And I wish Jesus had said it. Because most of the other great insights that I've learned come from Jesus. But this comes from a Chinese philosopher who lived and taught a few hundred years before Jesus. His name, we think, was Lao Tzu. His book is called the *Tao Te Ching*. And he wrote— as we say in rough English translation— he wrote that, *A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step*.

Many of the challenges we face in our personal lives, and in our shared life with others— many of the challenges we face are overwhelming. Personal debt. National debt. Being a hundred pounds overweight. Getting out of an abusive marriage. Coming back to God after many, many years. Getting sober. Reconciling with a person you haven't spoken to in ten years, twenty years, thirty years. *A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step*.

This morning, I am going to talk with you about our environment. Our planet. If the human race keeps going in the same direction that we have been going for the last few decades, then the human race will face a disaster. Or perhaps many disasters.

Last spring, a scientific study of children revealed that one in three American children between the ages of eight and eleven believe that all human life on our planet will end in their lifetimes because we humans will have destroyed the environment.

I don't know how it's possible to scientifically question children at that age. But another survey of Australian children found essentially the same thing in that country. *And* about one-third of American *adults* say that the damage of earth's environment is the biggest threat to us and to our way of life.

What can you do? Where do we go from here? You may put your hope in one of our two political parties. But I cannot. I do not see the leadership, in either party, that is going to tell America that a lot of pain is in our near future. And the longer we keep postponing the pain, the worse it's going to get. The parties are not going to tell us the truth. As I said in my newsletter article this July, American voters punish any politician or party that dares to tell the truth about the future and about some of the sacrifices we will inevitably make.

[Dove of Peace Lutheran Church is going to become the place where we talk about reality.](#) About the things that politicians won't talk about. About the things that other churches won't talk about.

Some Christian leadership, some where, has got to tell those children– to say nothing of their parents– that we hear them, and that the world is going to be okay because God created it and because we, God’s children, are going to take care of it. All of God’s children.

The challenges to our planet’s health are overwhelming. But: *A thousand mile journey starts with a single step.* When you take that first step– to cut the number of daily cigarettes in half, or to take a fifteen minute walk for exercise, or to spend fifteen minutes alone with your spouse, talking and listening to each other about what is going on in your lives– when you take that first step, that first baby step, you get a tremendous sense of power and confidence. We may not be able to control many things in our lives, but we can influence them. And that’s very empowering.

Last week, I told you that the mission fields of our congregation have to meet three criteria. They have to be faithful. They have to be something that Dove has experience in. And they have to be something for which the people around us are seeking leadership and hope and guidance.

God has given us a great ally in this mission. God has given us the Sonoran Desert. Most of us Tucsonans and Oro Valleans and Pima Counteans love this great desert, also known as the Green Desert because of all the life that is here. It makes it easier for us to think about and talk about why the health of our planet is important. People here naturally care about the world.

God uses the world to inspire in us a sense of wonder. God made the world wondrous. It is one of the main reasons that people come to believe in God in the first place. Whether they study the rocks, or the birds, or the oceans. And so the continued abuse and destruction of God’s wonders is a sin, an attack on God’s honor. Christians will speak out about having the Ten Commandments posted in public places, and Christians will object to art that abuses Christian symbols. But when mankind destroys half of an ocean, or a rainforest, or a mountain, or a whole food chain of life– where are the Christians then? Is God mocked more by a painting created by a man or woman than he is by the destruction of his own works that it took him eons to perfect?

The [Mission Statement of Dove of Peace](#) says that *The Holy Spirit gathers us into a community that enthusiastically claims and shares our experience of God’s Grace.* One of God’s gracious gifts is our planet. A kind of sacrament, some would say, a gift which is both a sign and a promise. Dove of Peace exists to claim that Grace, to lay hold of it, and to share it with others. Surely we can begin the long journey with a few small baby steps– and in the process, invite along our neighbors on this journey that many of them consider to be a matter of life or death.

Many of you know the old gospel song, “Shall We Gather at the River.” We’re not going to sing it today– we’re going to sing something more specifically about creation. But “Shall We Gather at the River” is inspired by Revelation. The Book of Revelation talks about this great heavenly city where we are all going to live someday. And at the center of that great, sparkling metropolis– there is a river, and a tree. Not a temple. Not a basilica. Not a statue. Not a Walmart. Not a WiFi hotspot. But a river, and a tree. The promise of Revelation is that after many upheavals and challenges, at the end of the long journey, we will find the peace and blessedness of God’s creation. Let us make sure that Dove of Peace is at least a signpost for the pilgrims who make that great journey. Amen.