**Oh, the Faith That You’ll Grow! - The Lorax**

**Genesis 1:24-31**

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*There are many great authors and lots of good books,
Books for dancers and plumbers and kitcheny cooks
There are books just for grown ups, for kids, and for teens
Books for old folks and babies and even the tweens
But the best of the bunch for each child, dog, or moose
Are the books that were written by the great Dr. Seuss!*

It’s summertime, friends, and after a rough spring of denominational chaos and budgeting woes, we are going to have a few weeks of fun. Today we start a new sermon series on lessons of faith found in the books of Theodor Geisel, otherwise lovingly known as Dr. Seuss. Now, I have to be honest and say that to my knowledge, Dr. Seuss wasn’t a particularly religious person. However, he was clearly someone who thought a great deal about what it means to be a moral, compassionate person in the world, and it’s not difficult to draw parallels between his words and those found in scripture. So, let’s spend some time this summer seeing what we can learn from friends like The Lorax, Yertle the Turtle, and, perhaps, the ghastly Grinch.

First, a little bit about the man himself. As I mentioned, Dr. Seuss was the pen name of Theodor Seuss Geisel who started his writing career at Dartmouth as a student author and illustrator for the campus magazine, the Dartmouth Jack-O-Lantern. In fact, he became editor-in-chief of the Jack-o-lantern but was required to resign after he was caught drinking gin in his room with some friends. It was, after all, the height of the Prohibition. Not much could stop him, though, and so in order to continue writing at the Jack-o-Lantern, he began to use the pen name Seuss.

Over time, he built a career in writing and drawing for prominent magazines and newspapers. He also began working in advertising where he earned enough to do a great deal of traveling. It was on a trip home from Europe that the rhythm of the ship’s engines inspired the first of his rhyming children’s books, And To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street.

Geisel was widely known to be a liberal democrat with a concern for social issues. While they were obviously written with children in mind, he still used his books to comment on many world events. He openly acknowledged that Yertle the Turtle was meant to represent Adolph Hitler, that The Butter Battle Book was about the arms race, and that Marvin K. Mooney Will You Please Go Now was addressed to Richard Nixon.

However, many of Suess’ books also explored what it means to be a good person, to be kind, humble, and compassionate. While it would be a stretch to say Suess intentionally wove Christian themes into his work, those themes are easy to find and Seuss’ clever poetry and amazing characters can only serve to inspire us as we walk the journey of faith. After all, as President Barak Obama once said, “Pretty much everything you need to know is in Dr. Seuss”.

So, let’s start with The Lorax. The Lorax is mostly narrated by a character named the once-ler who tells the story of how the once beautiful land where he lives became a dark and dreary wasteland. “Way back in the days when the grass was still green and the pond was still wet and the clouds were still clean, and the song of the Swomee-Swans rang out in space...one morning, I came to this glorious place. And I first saw the trees! The Truffula Trees! The bright-colored tufts of the Truffula Trees! Mile after mile in the fresh morning breeze.” Well, the once-ler goes on to say that under the trees lived the bar-ba-loots who ate the truffula fruit.

But, he was so taken by the truffula tuft that he decided he had to try making something from it. He cut down a tree and knit the tuft into a thneed. And the Lorax appeared to tell him to stop, but he wouldn’t listen and soon, he was selling more and more thneeds and he built a big factory, and chopped down more trees. And the air became smoggy and there was no more food for the bar-ba-loots or clean water for the Swomee-Swans. Before long, the once-ler had cut down all the truffula trees, the animals were all gone, the pond polluted, and the sky filled with smog.

Dr. Seuss wrote “The Lorax” in 1971 as he became aware of the devastating effects of urban development near his home in La Jolla, California. In fact, maybe you saw in the news this week that the tree in La Jolla that is reported to have inspired the truffula trees just fell down. Of course, development wasn’t only impacting the environment around La Jolla - widespread water and air pollution, overflowing landfills, and the rapid extinction of many animal species was happening around the world. Seuss wrote The Lorax to raise awareness about the impact of humanity on the environment and, hopefully, inspire people to change.

Almost 50 years later, things have only gotten worse. As you probably know, in March, the UN released its comprehensive assessment of the environment with warnings about how our current ways of living will soon begin to impact human health. “The science is clear. The health and prosperity of humanity is directly tied with the state of our environment,” said Joyce Msuya, Acting Executive Director of UN Environment. “This report is an outlook for humanity. We are at a crossroads. Do we continue on our current path, which will lead to a bleak future for humankind, or do we pivot to a more sustainable development pathway? That is the choice our political leaders must make, now.” In studies reported by the IPCC, it looks as though we have only 11 years to find a way to limit global warming before it will be too late.

The situation has become so frightening that youth around the globe planned 2300 school strikes in 130 countries last month to raise awareness that we are destroying the planet they must live in and demand change.

While politicians are the ones who must make policy changes in order to save our planet, we as Christ-followers, we have a clear calling in scripture to care for the earth and work for its protection and renewal.

In Genesis 1, as God creates the universe, the planet, and all living things, God also creates humanity and gives us responsibility to care for the rest. “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

Care and protection of the earth and her resources was the first responsibility God gave to humankind. Just as we are called to be stewards of the church, we are called to be stewards of the earth for God, in God’s place, and that means actively looking for how we can make a difference. As individuals, there are a number of things we can start doing today. Just eating less meat will reduce our carbon footprint. Planning meals and shopping intentionally leads to less food waste. Right now, 33 percent of global edible food is wasted and 56% of that waste happens in industrialized countries. We can also do things like reduce our use of plastics to reduce the amount of plastic that ends up in our oceans.

The United Methodist Church has long had social principles expressing the responsibilities humanity has for creation care. In 2016, the United Methodist Council of Bishops issued a pastoral letter entitled “God’s Renewed Creation: A Call to Hope and Action” in which they invited every United Methodist to work diligently toward restoration and renewal of the planet. They also issued a statement of protest when the US pulled out of the Paris climate accord. United Methodists across the country have been working within their communities to create change, and three new church starts have opened recently with a focus on creation care.

Here at church, we recently established the Earth Keepers group, which is looking at how to educate our congregation further about environmental issues and what changes we can make right here in the church. We are looking at everything from the soap in the bathrooms, to how we recycle, to lightbulbs and energy use. If you’re interested in helping out or learning more, contact Marilee Woodworth.

When The Lorax first appears to the once-ler and asks him to stop chopping down trees, he says, “I speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongues.” Again later, he announces, “I am the Lorax who speaks for the trees, which you seem to be chopping as fast as you please.”

Of all the living things on the planet earth, only humans have voices. Only we have language to fight for the lives of everything else. And so in addition to changing our own behaviors, part of our role as caretakers of God’s creation is to speak up, to advocate with our politicians for policy change. We have the technology and science and money to turn our country and world toward more sustainable development and to slow down the rapid destruction of the environment, but it has to become a priority. Only we can make that happen.

Which brings us to the end of The Lorax and the end of the sermon. As the once-ler finishes his story, he says, “unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.” It’s summer - the time of year when many of us are reminder just how spectacular God’s world is. As a follower of Christ and a child of God, what will you do this summer to keep it that way?

Amen.