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Remarks at inaugural meeting of the Faith in Solar campaign
Oct. 27, 2016
Greensboro, NC

Solarizing Congregations

Genesis 1:26-28 ²⁶ 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." ²⁷ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

This brief passage from the first chapter of the first book of the Bible speaks volumes about the relationship between people and planet. It is more than an eloquent introduction to God (theology), the planet (cosmology), and people (anthropology); it establishes the backdrop of our subsequent relationships in this world.

It shows us that we and the planet are related to each other. We are bene haadam and we are related to haadamah. If we read haadamah as "the earth" then we as "haadam" are "earthlings, those fit for (and according to Genesis 2) taken from the earth. In essence we are not just taken from but connected to our planet. As the planet goes, so go we as people. If the planet is healthy, we can be healthy.

Cabash and radah have been interpreted as “subduing” and exercising “dominion” over the earth. This (as Dr. Jurovics in his book *Hospitable Planet* rightly notes) give the impression that we are to rule over the earth and therefore do to it what we will. It might give the impression that we are the lords over it and our will is supreme.

But if you look at a few points from this larger passage it seems that that is not the case:

-Read with Genesis 1:26-27 it is clear that we are created in the image of God. This designation makes us special among creation for we are a reflection of the Creator. It says that there is something sacred about us that should be celebrated.

-What this image is, however, is never clear. Some speculate that it is that we “look like God,” others that we are to “act like God,” others that we are “intellectually” like God. Recently scholarship has turned to suggest that to understand the image we have to understand v.28.

-V.28 suggests that we exercise dominion over the earth and rule over it. But if this ruling is to be like God (Elohim)’s own rule, we should note some details about the larger chapter.

-God is orderly and does all things carefully and attentively (not destructively and abusively). In fact, if this is what many speculate it to be, an alternative Creation story to that of the Babylonians that shows our God cares for us and the world, this attention to order needs to be noted. Thus our “rule” over the

world should be done with “order” and attentiveness as God showed in Creation.

-God creates things and declares them “good.” This term can be both understood qualitatively (that this is not faulty, broken, or its state is not corrupted) and morally (that this is ethically whole, its character is without corruption). Thus our use of the planet should reflect the “goodness” that God emphasizes.

-In fact, the whole is deemed not just “tov” but “tov maod” or “very Good” after we are created, suggesting that our Creation was for the betterment of the planet. Our addition to this world was intended to make it “better” than it was without us, not to worsen it or to tear it apart.

So today I want to suggest that God placed us here to make this planet a better place. This should be reflected in our care of Creation.

As we come here today, we do so with that goal in mind. How do we make our world a better place?

-How can we transform a world that is run based on a carbon based fossil fuel energy paradigm into one that is dependent on clean, green energy?

-How can we transform an economic paradigm based on corporations owning and controlling limited carbon based fuel sources, to a paradigm

based on democratic ownership of our means of producing energy (things like solar panels on our homes and houses of faith)?

-How can we at the same time empower those who because of the color of their skin, the language that they speak, the fact that they have been incarcerated, the poor quality of their education, have been locked out of the economic model?

That is what we are here to speak about today. A greater vision of what I want to call a “cleaner, greener, better world.”

-Cleaner-reducing our carbon footprint

-Greener-turning to renewable energy sources

-Better-lifting us all, including those who live on the margins and empowering us to live as economic equals in society.

In part the plan that we will advocate today has to do with utilizing our houses of faith as sites to begin to think about solarizing our communities.

I want you to close your eyes for a moment and dream with me. Dream of a world that we could have.

Imagine a world with a green energy grid, where solar, wind, and hydroelectric means of production provide clean inexpensive energy to everyone.

Imagine a world where asthma rates and cancer rates have been greatly reduced because coal based power plants have been eliminated and coal ash no longer threatens our rivers and lakes.

Imagine a world where unemployment is a thing of the past because the shift to green energy means proliferation of green jobs to support a new green energy grid.

Imagine a world where the shift from carbon based transportation and fossil fuel industry has required us to replace our old cars and old trucks and old trains and old ships and old planes and old heating systems and old factories with new greener ones that need a new workforce to manufacture them and operate them.

Imagine a world where homelessness and poverty are things of the past because we have developed affordable, energy efficient homes that newly employed people making a living wage can afford to raise their families in and make a life in.

Imagine a world where racism is a thing of the past because we have finally realized that every person is a child of God, made in God's image, bearing a mark of God's divinity and deserving of dignity, equality, and shared prosperity in a nation replete with abundance.

Imagine a world where there is no more mass incarceration, no more violence, no more faction-based fear because we have come to value people and the planet more than profits and have decided to enact governmental policies that redeem and not denigrate all of humanity.

Imagine a world in which we realize that scarcity was just a myth because our common Creator has given us all that we need not just to survive, **but to thrive** with abundant renewable energy, an active fully employed labor force, and a planet healed and renewed.

This is the world that we can begin to work towards today. It is a cleaner world; a greener world; a better world. And more than that, it is **a possible world** for the only thing that stops the world we live in today from being that world we are imagining now is our choice to make it so!

We have the power to change the world! To end the threat of global climate change, to end the stranglehold of the fossil fuel industry on our world that perpetuates economic imbalance and the commodification of human beings, to reverse the rising global temperatures that threaten to end life as we know it on Earth.

We have the power to change the world! We have done it before when we eliminated the smog that suffocated our largest cities! We have done it before when we cleaned up the chemicals that polluted our nation's greatest rivers! We have done it before when we reduced the size of the hole in our ozone layer that protects our entire planet from the rays of the sun! These smaller environmental victories serve to remind us that we can overcome this crisis too!

We have the power to change the world! To put an end to humanity's inhumanity, and ghettos unfit for any mother's child, and shelters to house our sisters and brothers, and prisons to profit from the suffering of the poor!

We have the power to change the world! And all that it will take for us to do so is for us to **choose** to do so. It is a matter of changing hearts, and changing minds, and changing choices, and changing actions to change the world! It is a matter of will; if we choose to make it so, if we as a people choose to make it so, if we as a planet choose to make it so, it will be so! Our common Creator has given us a perfect planet fit for our thriving; we have to realize our responsibility to be stewards of this great gift. As I have said in other settings, we are not waiting on God to make this world right; God is waiting on us...we have to act...

This today starts that larger conversation and gives us the opportunity to "act" together. To begin to make a demand, not a political demand, but a theological demand, that houses of faith be able to access the energy that the Creator is giving directly to us from the sun. We can lead the way as people of faith with a theological paradigm that supports Creation Care by reducing our carbon footprint and solarizing our houses of worship.