

# Sermon Possibilities: Care for God's Creation

By David Radcliff of the New Community Project [www.newcommunityproject.org](http://www.newcommunityproject.org)

## 1. "Consuming passions"

Matthew 6:25-33

Americans consume their weight in material goods every day – that's the total of all goods consumed by all forms of commerce and agriculture and transportation, divided by the US population (see the resource *Consuming Appetites*, a link off the [Justice--or just us...](#) page of the New Community Project website). At this rate, US citizens need an average of 12 acres of the earth per capita to provide for them. Unfortunately, there are only 3 acres of productive land on earth for each person. (Source: Our Ecological Footprint)

This is both a sustainability issue and a justice issue. Clearly, the earth could not provide for all its inhabitants if everyone consumed at the rate we do. And how is it fair for some to so exceed their portion of the earth, while others are not able to secure enough to even survive? There are also possible implications of "idolatry" in the sense that we often look to material goods to provide us with a sense of worth and accomplishment, rather than turning to our God and our faith to provide these things in our lives. How can we regain a focus on our relationship with God as the center of our lives, which will then in turn affect our consumption patterns?

## 2. "All creatures great and small"

Genesis 1

Biologists estimate that some thousands of species of plants and animals become extinct each year. This is many times the historic average, and is due almost entirely to human activity. The primary culprit is habitat destruction caused by agriculture, ranching, and urbanization, but the hunting or capture of endangered species is also a factor. A recent study also predicted that global warming will also be a serious factor in the survival of God's creation, with as many as one-quarter of all species of plants and animals becoming extinct in the coming 50 years as a result of the warming global climate.

Is this loss of species a concern for Christians? If God created all living things and called them "good," what right does humankind have to remove species from the earth forever? How can we work in our communities, nation and world to preserve and protect other forms of life?

## 3. "Give it a rest"

Leviticus 25:1-7

Our daily routines are often filled with the cycle of working, purchasing, consuming, and working again so that we can purchase and consume. Indeed, with the average

American family carrying a \$7000.00 credit card debt, life for many of us must seem like a treadmill with no end in sight. And we don't stop on Sundays--this is now the busiest shopping day of the week.

One key biblical institution is the idea of the Sabbath. God called for a time of Sabbath rest once each week and one of every seven years. The Sabbath was for the renewal of the land, and for rest for humankind – modeled after God's own rest following creation. The Sabbath was also a reminder that it is not by continual striving after things that our lives are ultimately secured, but by recognizing God as the provider of every good and perfect gift.

The ancient tradition of Sabbath may provide a key for stepping away from our never-ending cycle of working, purchasing, and consuming – and the impact this cycle has upon God's earth. Can we intentionally set aside a day each week, perhaps Sunday, as a day to step away from our participation in the cycle? How might this affect us? How might it benefit both ourselves and God's earth? What impact might it have on our communities and the quality of life there?

#### **4. "You're getting warm..."**

Matthew 23:23-24

Jesus often condemned the behaviors or beliefs that focused on attention to detail--even enslavement to detail--without regard to the larger concerns of human well-being and the purposes of God for the earth. In this passage in Matthew, our Lord castigates those whose fixation on religious duties blinds them to the larger call for justice and mercy to others.

The World Health Organization tells us that 160,000 people are dying each year due to the effects of global warming. Millions more suffer from the increased number and severity of "natural disasters"--now nearly a misnomer, as human beings' warming of the climate has caused storms to escalate in number and intensity. (see link to *Global Warming as a Justice Issue* off the [Justice--or just us...](#) page of the New Community Project website).

Those who suffer most from these weather-related tragedies are most often the poorest members of our own and global society. For those in developing nations, their output of global warming gases is miniscule compared with residents of developed nations, yet these poorer ones are the most vulnerable to the consequences of warming.

Is this kind of suffering a justice issue? Are we in our society so fixated on the details of our lives--which involve daily contributions to global warming--that we don't see the broader issue of how our actions are affecting our neighbors?