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**Green Blades Preaching Roundtable**

Third Sunday in Lent, Year B.

March 3, 2024

John 2:13-22, 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, Psalm 19, Exodus 20:1-17

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“You shall have no other gods before me.”

Exodus 20:3

In “A Sand County Almanac”, Aldo Leopold wrote, *We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.i*

“A community to which belong”—how often do we view the land as a community of which we both a part of and dependent on? A community to which we have responsibilities, where neglect or abuse affect the whole community? How can this connect with us as members who belong to the Body of Christ?

“What’s that land worth?” A question that quickly comes up when word or rumor goes around about land in the neighborhood that is up for sale. In the real-estate marketplace section of a sales paper in my area, one finds properties listed, often with some pictures, like an aerial photograph of the property, and a list of the properties’ attributes—a stream flows through the property, hardwood or pine forest, farmland, potential building sites, potential places for food plots, and perhaps a glowing description of the land’s potential for “trophy bucks”—an especially popular attribute! Flyers occasionally arrive in the mail—have your land assessed. Land wanted! Sell now or buy now!  Indeed, the land is treated as a commodity, and something to be coveted, or even an idol with landownership a sign of wealth and power.

When treated as a commodity, the land is reduced to a superficial value. The biota, the web of life that inhabit the land either ignored or ranked on its economic benefits as just another item to be bought and sold. A commodity for the owner to do as they please with. It is reduced to solely what economic benefits are available in the land.  The life that dwells on the land is also ranked by its economic “worth”. The land is ranked on its agricultural or recreational value, or on the value of its mineral and timber resources.  When land is a commodity, do we really get to know the land and the lessons it teaches? Aldo Leopold referred to his farm on the banks of the Wisconsin River as a “Land Laboratory”. Could we also call it the Land Classroom? For the land teaches lifelong learning; there are always new lessons the land can teach us. Even when you have lived there for your entire life, there is always something new to learn from the land, just as the life of faith is lifelong listening and learning from the Holy Spirit.

When we look beyond the surface level, beyond the economic value, we may see the true value and beauty of the land and the community of life—from the insects to the trees, the flowers, the animals large and small, and ourselves, that are fed and sustained by the land, and how the land in turn sustains us. The health of the land reflects the health of the human beings who depend on it. When we see that the land, the Earth is a gift; a gift entrusted to us by God to honor and care for, we may see that it is a gift to be shared; a gift to love and respect; a gift that is for generations to come. When we see the land as a beloved creation of God with the *Imago Dei* all around us in the plants, the animals, the soil, and the water; when we feel the ground under our feet we feel the connection with creation, with life, with each other. For we are the one Body of Christ joined with him through all God’s good creation. How we treat the land, the Earth reflecting on how we treat one another, on how we treat each member of the Body of Christ.

May we remember our baptismal calling to strive for justice and peace, to care for the world God made, listen to its teachings, and to put no other gods before us.

*Luke Pederson is a Synodically Authorized Minister serving the congregations of Trinity of Norden and Good Shepherd in Mondovi, WI, located on the ancestral homelands of the Dakota people. He is a student at Wartburg Seminary in the TEEM Journey Together program and is the chair for the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin’s Creation Care Team.*