

HOW TO LET GREEN KINGDOM COME

Presentation by Joe Grabill to New Covenant Community (affiliated with Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, and Disciples of Christ churches), Normal, Illinois,
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To purchase
Green Kingdom Come! Jesus and a Sustainable Earth Community (2009),
go to www.greenkingdomcome.net and/or Amazon.com

Introduction

Green means to act sustainably and to meet present needs without compromising the ability of future members of Earth Community to meet their needs. We are moving in the direction of green becoming the new red, white, and blue. We have our first president with green goals. Our home town of Normal, Illinois is developing a sustainability plan. And we have a recently published green Bible, with one thousand verses printed in green ink to symbolize their connection to the ecology. The pope has stated an 11th commandment: “Thou shalt not pollute. It’s a sin.”

In this stage of the greening of our culture, our Christian tradition is not providing access to a green Jesus. I am a retired professor of environmental and religious history, and have made 7 research trips to the Holy Land. My book is the first to introduce a Jesus who can help inspire us to let *Green Kingdom Come!* Jesus taught two themes compatible with sustainability: Include everyone in the realm of God, and, Leave enough for everyone to eat. The book—

- Shows a non-sectarian overlap of secular and biblical language, and links science, technology, health, and spirituality.
- Includes my personal life story.
- Demonstrates how the lifestyle, ecology, and teachings of Jesus were green.
 - His childhood lifestyle involved a sustainable, no money economy Nazareth. He danced lyrics at festivals from the earthiest book in the Bible, the Song of Solomon, which celebrates 25 kinds of plants. His adult lifestyle as an itinerant involved a low carbon footprint. He did not own a house.
 - His ecology in Galilee was lush. He lived among 500 wild bird species—the same number as in the US today but in an area 300 times smaller.
 - In his green teaching he said in Mark 4 that wild mustard seeds show that the realm of God is everywhere. The realm of God, he said in Aramaic in Luke 17, is *legau*—among, around, and inside our guts.

- He said in Luke 12, Consider crows. They don't plant, harvest, and build barns, and thus, he implied, act sustainably and leave food for others.
- Includes 11 green principles based on 70 sayings of Jesus (e.g., Rain drops have no enemies; The ecology, not money, creates value).
- Features numerous green practices.

Include everyone in the realm of God

The realm of God includes breath and wind. Jesus said in John 4 to the Samaritan woman, "God is *R-r-ru—ah*. God is Breath. *Ru-ah* also means Wind and Spirit. God is Wind.

The realm includes breathing animals. In the Genesis story God Breath breathed into our nostrils the breath of life, and each of us became a *naphsha*, a living soul. Since Genesis uses the word *naphsha* about cows, it's clear that God breathed into the nostrils of cows the breath of life, and they became living souls. God is the *Ru-ah* in the lungs of every breathing soul, in the ocean and on land. The realm includes breathing sharks, frogs, storks, and bats.

The realm includes a strong, expelled breath from the diaphragm, a laugh. Jesus said in Luke 6, "Those who weep will *ge-hech*." The word for laugh in Aramaic is *ge-hech*, an onomatopoeic word. The laugh sound in Aramaic is *ge-hech-hech-hech*. In English, ha-ha-ha. Children today on average laugh 400 times a day and adults 15 times. Laughter is diaphragm exercise enhancing the immune system and increasing our health and our green awareness.

The realm includes water. Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3, "You must be born again of *May-ah* and *Ru-ah*, Water and Breath." Nicodemus said, in response to Jesus, "Must I, an old man, re-enter my mother's womb and be born again?" To my mind Jesus was saying, "Nicodemus, be reborn by embracing the Water circulating inside your body and inside the bodies of the supposedly unclean peasants, prostitutes, beggars, lepers, and Samaritans, and supposedly unclean animals of the world around you." One of the eleven principles in the book is: Life flows from inside water out.

Life does not flow as abundantly inside bottled water out because bottled water is one of the most energy-inefficient products imaginable. On average Americans spend \$400 annually for bottled water, and 50 cents for tap water. Water from the tap, generally more pure than bottled water, costs 800 times less. To purchase bottled water is to pay for the noise, oil, and machinery to make the plastic, to pump and bottle the water, to haul the bottle in a truck, to stack it in a store, to pay salaries for all the people, from the CEO on down, in the company bottling the water, and to recycle the plastic or to add it to the landfill or it throw it away to enter a stream and suffocate marine animals who think it is food. Green San Francisco has banned the sale of bottled water and Chicago is taxing it. Today is a good day to carry around a reusable container of tap water.

The realm includes humans inside and outside our clan. Here's my embellishment of a story in Matthew 12. One day Jesus sat on a large basalt boulder in the middle of a crowd. A

person said, “Hey, your mother and your brothers have just arrived.” Jesus, perhaps winking obviously at his brothers, said, “Who in the world are those guys? Right here,” pointing both at the basalt rock and his friend Peter, whose name means Rock, “here are my mother and brothers.” Some gasped at what they considered the rudeness of Jesus toward his mother and brothers. The gaspers did not catch the use by Jesus of gross caricature to teach that the human family has no boundaries.

The realm includes nobodies without legal rights. Jesus said many times, “Children are greatest in the realm of God.” Children in his day had no legal rights. Fathers could legally put them to death. How could nobodies be greater than Caesar and the high priest? The saying was a satire on conventional ideas about social standing. Some listeners went *ge-hech-hech-hech*. His own disciples tried to shoo children away from him. Today the new constitution of Ecuador is the first in the world to give rights to previously considered legal nobodies—plants, animals, and habitats.

How to include everyone in the realm of God

A way is to enlarge our hearts. Jesus said, “Love your enemies.” To love in Aramaic is to *hab*, which means to open our hearts and let the outside Earth community flow into veins and arteries. Enemy in Aramaic is *b’eld’baba*. *B’eld* means outsider, and *baba* means papa, an insider. Hearts as big as all outdoors make outsiders insiders. Today we can learn from bonobo primates, close cousins of ours, who have no enemies within or outside their species. Daily living for bonobos is mutual embracing among all ages and within and across gender lines.

An important way to make outsiders insiders is to have conversations with everyone. I began conversing with trees after a friend in the 1980s pointed out that I was not superior to a 400-year old bur oak, a longer-lived elder than the United States. There are particular bur oak trees I know well near Lake Evergreen, and I have had many conversations with them.

Conversations with bur oaks are fairly easy. Harder conversations would be with Japanese beetles, cancer, and coal companies that blast the tops off mountains to get at coal seams and that pollute rivers downstream. If we practice hard dialogues, anyone can teach us that they are already within the realm of God and within Earth Community, no matter how sustainably or unsustainably they act.

If talking with God is comfortable for you, here’s a conversation modeled after the Lord’s Prayer. “God, let thy green kingdom come.” God says, “If you want to help that happen, listen to those you consider outsiders—the deformed and thistles.” You say, “I’ll try to hear what they say, because I want thy green will to be done on Earth.”

Leave enough for everyone to eat

As noted earlier, Jesus said, “Consider crows.” These birds are communitarian. They share food each of them gathers with young and old, singles, and paired crows. Every crow eats and leaves enough for other species to eat.

In the gospel stories the feedings of the 4,000 and the 5,000 are illustrations for humans of what crows do. The feedings led by Jesus were mind-boggling, politically incorrect, communitarian potlucks, where folk, seated randomly, could not avoid touching each other as they passed the bread and fish. Untouchable lepers and Pharisees, beggars and rich folk, and women (who were only supposed to eat at home in the presence of their husbands) and men had equal access to food. For the first centuries, the symbols of the Christian movement were the unspeakably revolutionary bread and fish (not bread and wine) shared within communitarian potlucks.

The Hebrew tradition within which Jesus grew up had within it a radical commandment. Yahweh in Leviticus 25 asked the Hebrews every fifty years to have a Jubilee Year, to give agricultural soil a rest, and to open it up to poor people and to open it to wild plants and animals. "Proclaim liberty," Yahweh said, "throughout the land to all its inhabitants." Today we need to take less land, resources, food, and energy and to leave more for the wild inhabitants. A Jubilee Earth Community would involve every human and More-than-human member leaving enough food so that what could be called "inter-species communitarian potlucks" would become the norm as daily practice throughout an increasingly wild world.

Our species has practiced excessive taking, which is the main cause in the extinction of 300,000 species in the last 50 years. We are suffocating *Ru-ah* out of our sister and brother species, exactly the opposite of what God did in Genesis. While we are gathered here we could hold a funeral for one more species that has gone kaput this week. The prospect is for 1 million or more species to go extinct in the next 50 years. And it's not only somewhere else where this ecocide is taking place. In our area here, over half of the fresh-water mussel species in the Mackinaw River are already dead forever because of water polluted by nitrates.

Can we feel the profound loneliness caused by the absence of whole branches in our Earth family tree? Are we too narcissistic not to notice the eternal disappearance of the passenger pigeons flying over central Illinois in flocks of thousands? Do we have so many hypnotic idols made with our own hands that we don't see that we can't see the stars at night?

How to leave enough for everyone to eat

To leave enough means not to waste energy. If we eat soy, we use 8 times less energy than if we eat what some are calling greenhouse hamburgers, greenhouse bacon, and greenhouse fried chicken. We take 60 times less from Earth if we eat fruit and vegetables rather than meat. Grazing animals we eat take up 30% of arable land, and fruits and vegetables take up less than 1%. Pass the grapes.

One method of leaving enough is to plant trees and thereby enlarge eco-diversity. Did Jesus plant trees? In Nazareth, at the birth of every boy, the community planted a tabor oak.

At the birth of every girl, the community planted an acacia. Quite likely Jesus participated in these tree plantings.

For green kingdom to come we must not cut down any virgin forest, like the boreal forest stretching from the Bering Sea in Alaska to the Atlantic provinces of Canada, and to expand tree planting exponentially. A mature tree provides 10 pounds of the 400 pounds of oxygen an individual breathes annually. A mature tree absorbs 300 pounds of carbon dioxide annually. Trees are sustainability giants.

The premier of Ontario in Canada, Brian McGuinty, in the last few months set aside half of the province, a forested area the size of Texas, as a wilderness preserve. The winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004, Wangari Maathai of Kenya, has, through her Green Belt Movement, already planted 300 million trees and has the goal of planting an additional billion trees. I invite you to promise to plant at least one tree this fall. In our area we have a new grove, Bur Oak Grove, in Children & Elders Forest within which you can participate. Consult www.ceforest.org

Another method is to end the enthronement of single-species, monotonous grass yards which stifle diversity. We can, as some say, "eat our yards," plant vegetables and berries in the yard, and reduce the waste of transporting our food on average 1,800 miles. Michelle Obama put in a vegetable and berry garden in the White House lawn this year.

Conclusion

There is much about the book I have not told you. You can read it and find out about Ecoholics Anonymous and about a world-wide restitution ritual. Appendices include an Aramaic glossary and a list of green practices. There is an extensive bibliography.

Now let's conclude with a most earthy word: A-MEN. It means in Aramaic truly grounded. Or to expand, it means to take everything we have said and done today, and let it find its earthiness in our living. A-MEN.