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**Seminary lecture series studies what the Bible teaches about the land and food**

Elkhart, Ind. (AMBS) – Land is more than real estate, and more than a resource that can be exploited, an Old Testament theologian emphasized in a series of lectures at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, February 28 and 29.

Ellen Davis, Ph.D., professor of Bible and practical theology at Duke Divinity School, Durham, N.C., explored different ways in which the Bible speaks about land and how God intends humans to care for the land. “The land is a living thing that has a right to expect something of us,” she said in her opening lecture. The Bible has no concept of arable land as something to own; Israelites understood that God owned the land and God called them to be resident aliens on it.

In the Genesis 1 creation story, all creatures came into being through God’s desire and for God’s delight and Davis suggested that the role of human was to cherish them. “Our role is simply this—we are the intended cherishers of God’s creation. We are to see what exists and value it as good.”

In Genesis 2:15, God gives human beings the assignment to till and tend the land, or serve and preserve it. The Hebrew words that are used are religious terms, Davis said. The human task was to work for the garden and serve its needs. “The verbs imply vulnerability; anything humans must tend can be neglected or abused.”

Another aspect of land and food that Davis examined was in the experience of the Israelites as they left Egypt and wandered in the desert. She pointed out that the Israelites were placed in the position of the most vulnerable members of the culture, that of gleaners. They were limited to what they could use in a day and, in God’s field, the amounts adjusted themselves to what people needed. For the Israelites, both restrictions—gathering only as much as they needed and honoring the Sabbath, were meant to heal Israel.” The basic message of Exodus 16 is that all food belongs to God, she noted.

This way of living was in contrast to the Egyptian system of building granaries to hold large amounts of food. Davis compared our current culture of hoarding , consumption and waste to that of the Egyptian culture. “We have difficulty living with restrictions that we cannot understand, but we must live with them if we are going to live at all,” she said. “We have not found a way to eat that is not destructive of the land on which we live.

The author of the upcoming book *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* said, “We have lost the practice of farming as a craft.” She recommended that her audience learn to know the farmers who care for the land as God intended. “Continue to learn theology from them while you also learn more formal theology in the classroom,” she said.

Davis’s presentations were this year’s Theological Lectureship, an annual series for which the seminary invites scholars in different disciplines of seminary study to address the seminary community. This year’s lectureships was hosted by the Bible department.

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