

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

October 21, 2018, The 22nd Sunday After Pentecost/The 29th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Genesis 1:26-30, Romans 8:18-25

**SERMON SERIES: STEWARDS FOR CHRIST—
THE STEWARDSHIP OF CREATION: DOMINION VS. DOMINANCE**

During the last three weeks you have been filling out questions on yellow sheets that shaped the next week's sermon. One of last week's question asked: "When I thank God for the gifts of Creation some of my favorite places in creation are":

The answers you gave to the question were varied. Some wrote of places close by, and others remembered favorite travels.

One person wrote: "...some of my favorite places are all around me. Just sitting in my yard watching the trees, or clouds move, will welcome me into the infinite. By admitting my smallness, I am welcomed in to the strength of the all-powerful."

Someone else had similar feelings: some of my favorite places are" the vast spaces, open fields, oceans or mountains—where I feel small and vulnerable and I can do nothing but trust in God's grace and mercy and protection."

Two people wrote about Stronghold camp where our children and youth go in the summer. I read about National Parks, waterfalls in Michigan, the Great Lakes, woods, streams, caves, beaches, and a "field by my old home-place in the spring is full of Johnny Jump Ups. You can make the tiniest bouquets."

One person wrote: "Though corn and bean fields have been a part of my life for most of the last 20 years, they do not speak to my soul like water and trees do. But there are time those fields take my breath away. When driving, and to the horizon the crops are growing, the sky limitless, I see God's handiwork. And sometimes the empty fields remind me there are times of Sabbath; and times of want and lacking. Sometimes in the cold, frozen ground, empty of all but the remnants of the harvest, I am reminded of God's power, because I am still here, still working, still growing, still learning."

And one person wrote of their garden: "Some of my favorite places are my flower gardens, and all the birds, bees, butterflies and critters that call them home. Of course there are the spring and summer blooms, but there is such peace and awesomeness in fall and winter as well, as the plants and blooms wither and their energy go to their roots to rest and be ready for new growth in the spring. It is so quiet it makes it easy to hear the silent voice of God...My bench swing stays up all year and offers a great place to meditate and pray. It is so easy to just feel creation all around and remember God in our lives."

The reason I asked this question is that we are spending these four weeks talking about Stewardship, or being caregivers, of all the good things God has put into our lives. One of the gifts that God has given us is the creation that surrounds us.

I realize that in some circles discussing caring for the environment and creation can be viewed as a political discussion. But this morning we are talking about theology. We're talking about what God has done and what we do in response to God's gifts.

We're talking about what we believe as people of faith who believe God created the earth and named it good and then put it into our care.

This is the lens we are looking through this morning.

Because we are talking about being caretakers of God's good gifts, the second question people answered on the yellow sheets asked: "One of the ways I care for creation is:"

People wrote about recycling, supporting groups that care for the environment, limiting consumption, and "being gentle to God's creatures," including the person who "let the wren family live in the soffit of my back porch this summer."

Others wrote about using clean energy, not wasting water, buying locally grown food, turning off lights & using LED bulbs, using reusable bags, reusable water bottles and cloth napkins, carpooling, using less chemical cleaners, growing plants for bees and butterflies, planting trees, and planting native plants.

Our care for the planet must concern every one of us. Not only because pollution is bad, the ozone has holes in it, the effect of greenhouse gases continues, the rainforests are being consumed, and our oceans, lakes and rivers are still dumping grounds.

But we must be concerned because God gave us this planet as an incredible gift.

As we continue our conversations about Stewardship, today we are talking about being care givers of the planet that God has entrusted to all of humanity, and specifically to each one of us.

The very first chapter of the Bible makes it very clear that God has not set us spinning in the cosmos and left us on our own. Instead God created the world and then created people, and gave us the gift of dominion over the earth and the seas and their creatures, and over the water, air, soil, plants and trees.

God said to us in creation and God says to us still in Genesis 1: “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. See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you will have them for food.” (Genesis 1:28-29)

Words like “subdue” and “dominion” have gotten our planet into a lot of trouble at the hands of people through the ages. God has handed us the power and beauty of creation, and too many times people have taken this incredible gift of God as something to be exploited, controlled and abused.

What the Bible actually means by the concept of dominion is much different.

Dominion, in the biblical sense of the word, means that we are created in God’s image to be the care-takers of creation. We are God’s representatives here on earth, and we are asked to nurture and care for creation, not exploit it.

The Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggeman ([The Land](#) and [Genesis Commentary, Interpretation series](#)) says that we have been given power and responsibility over the planet.

He asks us to imagine that we are to have dominion over the planet, the way a shepherd has dominion over his sheep.

The shepherd’s goal is that the sheep be cared for, tended, fed, watered, and kept safe.
We are the shepherds of creation.

He also writes that if we think of the political realm, we are to govern the earth like a shepherd king. Then dominion isn’t about exploitation and abuse. It has to do with working for the well-being of every other creature, and helping creation and the creatures to be their very best, as God intended and created them to be.

In addition he writes that the Christian understanding of dominion must be seen as following the way of Jesus Christ who ruled by serving. Brueggemann writes: “Lordship (or dominion over creation, then) means servanthood. It is the task of the shepherd not to control, but to lay down his or her life for the sheep (John 10:11). The human person is ordained over the remainder of creation but for its profit, well-being, and enhancement. The role of the human person is to see to it that the creation becomes fully the creation willed by God.”

This biblical idea of dominance, and the commandment that we have from God to care for the earth, is a weighty responsibility. And it is an amazing gift. God has trusted each one of us with care of the planet and the authority to be in control, in charge, of what happens to creation.

As Brueggemann says, we are not servants of God when it comes to creation, but “agents of God to whom much is given and from whom much is expected.” (p.33)

We have been made agents of God, called to serve wolves, bears, oaks and pines, deer, eagles, and the wrens nesting in our soffits.

We are called to serve tigers, and lions, and redwood forests, and the oceans and mountains of the world.

We are called to serve the Great Lakes, the Mississippi River, the streams that feed the Mississippi, and good earth planted with corn and soy beans.

The final question people answered from the yellow sheets asked: “How does care for the planet tie into your faith journey?” These wise answers are a fitting conclusion to this morning’s sermon as we listen to each other:

One of you wrote: Care for the planet ties into my faith journey “Because the earth is the Lord’s and the first assignment to Adam was to tend the garden... (not to be wasteful)...I try to be faithful with resources, to not be wasteful, and to be efficient, not needing the newest gadgets or nicest clothes. I mentor people on managing money, time and resources.”

Another person wrote: “Globally and locally I recycle and conserve, I try to live within our means ...and I try to help those in need of help—human, or animal, fish, birds or critters. All this makes sense to me as a Christian, and as helping care for our planet. If we truly live as Christians, live in love, then of course we LOVE all of creation.”

A high schooler wrote: “It’s our responsibility to take care of the planet for future generations.” And another High Schooler wrote: “In preserving the earth, I give others a safe place to worship for years to come.”

And a final response: Care for the planet ties into my faith journey because: “We are a miraculous organism. We are part of a miraculous ecosystem, which is part of a miraculous solar system. Just as the creation of our sun eons ago affects us, our actions affect others, our Earth, and all of God’s creation. Our stewardship effects it all.”

As God’s agents, as people created in the image of God, let us celebrate and rejoice in the gift that we have been given.

We are called to be stewards and care-givers of this planet.

We are called by God to be careful shepherds who have creation in our care.

As the last person wrote: Our stewardship effects it all!