

“Care of Creation”
Genesis 1:26-31; Romans 8:18-27;
Luke 12:22-34

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In the beginning, God created. After creation was set in motion, God said, “Behold, it is very good.”

It seems that God delighted in what God had created. There’s a sense of joy there at the end when we hear God say, “Behold, it is very good.” I can never get to that point without hearing my old professor of Hebrew in seminary. One of the moments when he was most expressive in this dry conversation was where he talked about how God said it was *very good*. That was the beginning and it was very good.

It is in that moment that we also hear about God bringing forth human life, making humans in God’s image, and in Chapter 2, breathing life into human beings. We have this sense of God engaging humans in the creation, in the naming of the animals, in the tending of the garden. Sometimes we get a little hung up in this passage because in the middle of this, when God is saying creation is very good and inviting us to engage with it, there are these words about subduing and dominating, having dominion over. It feels a little out of place. So, I had to look at those words a little more closely.

One thing that I’ve heard is that the original words changed over time, so that as you get later in the history of Hebrew, they become much more strident kinds of words. But the other thing is that as people have looked at these words, they have noted that the word for “subdue” really means “to help something become what it can become.” One person said it’s like having a room full of noisy children and if you help them subdue that noise a little bit, they actually become happier. The way I thought about it was an apple tree or a grape vine needs a little subduing to give its best fruit. It needs a little pruning. There’s a way it feels like we are invited to engage with creation so that creation might be the best that it can be.

The word for “dominion” means “to have authority over” something. One author suggested that it’s the authority of someone who comes down to be amongst and an equal of that which it has authority over. That is in some ways the description of Christ, coming and becoming an equal among us, coming as one of us to show us the grace of God.

As we think about these initial passages and how they begin to shape our understanding of who we should be, it’s a reminder that as God gave us breath and life it was an invitation to reflect God’s way in creation. As God comes to help us become the best humans we can be, to be in relationship to God, we get to do the same thing with creation. God has welcomed us into the world he has created, and in welcoming us, invites us to participate.

Jesus is reminding us in some ways that God pays attention. God cares about the birds of the air. God makes sure that creation works so that the animals have the food they need. The ravens can find food even though they don't create barns and store it all up. The flowers of the field are so beautiful. There's this sense of God caring so much for creation that he makes it beautiful, perhaps awesome, a reflection of the creator.

We come along and somehow it feels a little like we have difficulty in trusting that God would create something that would sustain us. Right from the beginning we have this distrust that God has given us the life that we should have. We feel like we should have something more, that we should be able to eat from the tree of knowledge so that we can be more like God (and less like humans, maybe?). But Jesus is noting that in the process we have developed quite a bit of anxiety and we tend to end up worrying where our sustenance is going to come from and how we're going to make it all work and how we might live together.

It feels to me like we become so worried about the world we create that we get out of touch with the very creation God has given us. We're so worried about what we have to eat, or what we have to wear and whether it fits with what everybody else has to wear, and how we fit in our society, that we can lose track of our connection with creation. So much so that we have all these things that we have to now worry about because we've just used creation to satisfy our own desires. We have to think about things like climate change. We have to think about things like mass extinction of species. We have to think about things like why we have toxic air sometimes. Even driving in the other day, the smoke was settled in our valley. Yet it's so easy to forget that we're part of something much larger than ourselves in terms of being part of the ecosystem we live in and the world that God has given us.

That disconnection in some ways feels to me like it breaks the very direction God first gave us to engage in a way that makes the best creation, the best of all worlds through the life God has given us. Certainly in Romans, Paul is suggesting that perhaps creation is bound to decay because we're waiting for the revealing of the children of God. Is there some way in which we can see in our own world today that perhaps creation needs the revealing of the children of God?

There's a story about an Irish saint named Saint Kevin. Saint Kevin was a very religious, very faithful man who wanted to just pray in the wilderness. So he went up to this place called Glendalough outside of Dublin, where there were a couple of lakes. He built himself a little building in which to pray. In the 400s, the way of praying was to hold his hands out to the side, but the building was so little that he often would just stick one of his hands out the window while he was praying. While he was praying a bird came and landed on his hand. Then another one came. One of them went away and came back, and then the other one went away and came back. Pretty soon he had a nest in his hand. He thought, "I've got to keep praying." The story goes that the birds laid some eggs, sat on those eggs, and finally fledged their young ones before he could quit praying. The story is of him caring more about creation than his personal needs. It's an apocryphal kind of story. We doubt that it really happened, but what does it describe?

It describes one that cares so much about the effect he has on creation that he's willing to put its needs before his own, to care about the birds and about creation.

Is there a way that story reveals what the children of God are like? The children of God are revealed, Paul says, and creation is freed. In that conversation in Romans, it says we are just experiencing the first fruits of the Spirit. What are the first fruits? Throughout scripture, first fruits are what you brought to God because it was the best. You brought the first of what you had, the best of what you had, to God. If we're just beginning to experience the first fruits of the Spirit, the idea is they are the very thing we need to give to God, the part of our experience with God that we want to give to God. In some ways, that's the place we want to get to so that we can have our lives be first fruit, what we want to give to God.

There's another place where the fruit of the Spirit is talked about. In Galatians, the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. What I'm going to suggest is that as we open ourselves to the Spirit of God and we allow that Spirit to work out those fruits in us, to produce the fruits of the Spirit, those are the very fruits that enable us to be in right relationship with creation and with God. It is that we can give to God. Aren't love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control the things that are central to being able to be in good and right relationship with God, with each other, and with creation?

When Jesus goes on to talk about "where your treasure is, there your heart is," what do we truly treasure? As I was thinking about what the treasure of faith is, to me it is the relationship with God. Perhaps what heaven truly is, is when we are in the most complete relationship with God, when we are in God's presence and we recognize it, and we're in that moment in a way that we rarely can be in the rest of the time we've had. Perhaps it just me, but it feels to me that when we're in really good relationships, that's when there is some of the greatest joy of our lives.

This is an invitation to be in the best of relationships with God, with each other, and with God's creation. As we focus on the fruit of the Spirit, as we focus on what it means to follow Jesus, we build up treasure—a treasure that enables us to have that relationship with God, to be God's people, to be God's children. I really believe there is really no greater joy than knowing God, being in God's presence, and knowing God's love. That's the pattern for all of life.

So as we think about our lives, our calling, our opportunity, we are invited to recognize how God welcomes us into God's creation, enabling us to have that relationship, to be able to trust it, and to make the whole of our lives engaged with creation, and with one another and with our God. Perhaps that's what it means to be human. When we are able to open ourselves to the fullness of those relationships and that's where our treasure is, that's where our heart is as well. Amen.