

“Good”  
Preached by Rev. Carol Reynolds  
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Genesis 1, 2:1-4 Sermon  
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I hope that, spoken through those nine beautiful voices, you were able to hear Genesis’ first creation story anew, perhaps almost as if for the first time. Freed from the elements that have tainted it for us over the years: Freed from gender inequality. Freed from temptation, disobedience, blame, and shame. Freed from literalism, scientific analysis, and politicization. Hear this text for what it is: A poetic doxology, a song of praise, to our Creator. And hear the divine love song tucked within that doxology, a love song enacted by the Creator in those very acts of creation and in the blessings bestowed upon each created thing, animate and inanimate: Again and again “God saw that it was good,” and finally, “Indeed, it was *very* good.”

Original blessings.

One challenging bit that *does* remain is the language of dominion: “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”...“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.” If ever there were license to harness the earth’s resources, to overpopulate and over-consume; here it would seem to be. And yet how can this be if we were indeed made in God’s image and likeness, a God whom we have just witnessed blessing *all* creation and deeming it *all* good? A God who does not forcibly control that creation, but has granted to human beings reason and intellect, and the liberty and responsibility of free will. A God who took formlessness and imposed order and the clear boundaries of day and night, water and sky,

water and dry land, work and rest. A God whom it seems we could assume would desire that *all* creation would thrive, rather than devolve into the void and the chaos from whence we came.

Not only this, but, as always, it's important to remember context. We must take into consideration the human lenses through which the scriptures were transmitted to us. This portion of Genesis has been attributed to priestly authors and has been characterized as a counter-cultural protest of the people of Israel against the violent and bloody creation story of their Babylonian captors.<sup>1</sup> As they struggled to praise God in a foreign land, hope and faith were all that were left to the remnant of the Jewish community for whom this passage was composed. Their Temple, once the outward sign of God's favor, by 587 BCE had been demolished by the invading Babylonians. Now they had to endure the constant doubt and humiliation of being reminded that it was not Yahweh, but the great god Marduk, who had finally won the day. A reminder was needed that their homeland was not permanently lost, that the Temple would one day be rebuilt, and that Yahweh was still in control. And even as God's name was still majestic in all the earth, so were God's people to remember their original calling as God's image in creation.<sup>2</sup> Throw in the language of dominion and sublimation, and these are fighting words, as well as gentle words of affirmation and encouragement.

But, perhaps most important to remember, is that dominion is not actually a synonym for domination. As opposed to the misinterpretation of "subduing and using up," which some have preferred and even used to justify an apocalyptic "theology of dominion," dominion is in truth something more akin to stewardship: "to have the responsibility for the care of something."

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, Barbara Brown: *Luminous Web: Essays on Science and Religion*, Boston: Cowley Publications, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Deffenbaugh, Daniel G.: "A Lot Lower Than God," *Seeds of Shalom*, 2008.

Not entitlement, but responsibility. We were made and commissioned to be caretakers of the earth and its inhabitants, not insatiable consumers of all its delectable fruits.

And so we come at last to the Center for Progressive Christianity's Point 7. The 2011 version states that, "By calling ourselves progressive, we mean we are Christians who strive to protect and restore the integrity of our Earth," which sounds very much like a God-ordained stewardship role updated for the harsh ecological realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The 2003 version went like this, "By calling ourselves progressive, we mean that we are Christians who form ourselves into communities dedicated to equipping one another for the work we feel called to do: striving for peace and justice among all people, protecting and restoring the integrity of all God's creation, and bringing hope to those Jesus called the least of his sisters and brothers." The peace and justice portion of this statement has since been separated out into its own Point: the new Point 6. Certainly peace and justice for all human beings is a significant enough objective to warrant its own, free-standing point. But the beauty of the integrity of creation and justice and dignity for all human beings co-existing under a single statement is that it pointed to the interconnectedness of all creation generally and of ecological and human issues specifically. Where the earth is least protected or restored is typically where the least among us live and breathe and suffer the ill effects of pollution and deforestation. This we know.

You may be wondering how any of this relates to fatherhood or families. Jesus' closeness to God and references to him as "Abba," or "Papa" point to his understanding of relationship to Creator God as an intimate "Parent of all Creation." I believe today's Genesis text implies this too, but in a manner that feels way too cosmic and transcendent to dare refer to the Creator as "Daddy" or "Papa," "Mama," or "Mommy." But maybe that's just what we need to do in order to broaden

the scope of our love and care. We have a natural, evolutionary instinct to engage in what has been called “kin altruism,” to look after our blood relatives. Yet, in the midst of his earthly ministry, Jesus all but disowned his biological family in order to devote his time and energy to the least of his day. Back then that didn’t necessarily have to mean endangered species, dirty water, or scorched earth. Today it does...

Now I am certainly not suggesting that we abandon our families to activism. But I am suggesting that we make room in our hearts and on our calendars for this broader family of God, human and inhuman; that we practice what John Dominic Crossan has referred to as Jesus’ “radical egalitarianism” in our own context. And that we do so both because the truth is that we rise or fall together...and because we were created in God’s image and must therefore love every last piece of Creation as passionately and as tenderly as God does.

I wonder sometimes, though, if *loving ourselves* isn’t the biggest hurdle of all. How much of our hunger for things, for stature and recognition is about compensation for the emptiness we feel inside? How many of our fractured relationships are the result of low self-esteem, which may manifest in any number of ways: as competitiveness or judgment, perfectionism or neediness, acquisitiveness or recklessness, blaming or shaming? For many of us, these are habits and mindsets we were taught from the cradle, for our own good, so that, heaven forbid, we wouldn’t get swelled heads. I can’t say that I’ve ever met anyone who had a true, genuinely swollen head, but I’ve witnessed a lot of destruction wrought by people with less than healthy egos. No doubt it is the one-upsmanship of colonialism and all kinds of other oppressive “isms” that have landed us where we are today, at an environmental crossroads.

And so, as we seek to heal and respond to the many ecological crises that face us, it is imperative that we return to our roots, our beginning, in God. Can we use this text in much the same way that was intended in its original context: To counter the doubt and humiliation we feel at the sight of our human-compromised landscape with hope and faith in God? To remind ourselves that our homeland need not be permanently lost, but can be rebuilt, and that God's hand still guides from above, beside, and within? And that, even as God's name is still majestic in all the earth, so are we, God's people, to remember our original calling as God's image in creation? We were made good, very good, male and female. We were created to be thoughtful, responsible caretakers of an abundant earth. We were made to love and respect God, and hence to love, respect, and care for all that God has created, including our selves.

There are no foregone conclusions about our destruction. There is no need to argue the finer points of how God created the earth and how long exactly it took. Let us not get lost behind such smokescreens, which obscure the forest for the trees. Let us partner with God and with one another to cherish and nurture ourselves, our diversity of neighbors, and the home we all share back to health, wholeness, and original goodness. Let our words and actions reflect the legacy bestowed upon us by our divine Parent from the very beginning of time. Let our earthly lives be characterized by gratitude and love, responsibility and respect.

May it be so.

Amen.