

“The Gift of the Earth: Living in Gratitude”

Genesis 1:20-22, 28 / Psalm 65 :8~13 (CEB)

Today’s scripture, Psalm 65 may be excellent resources in learning gratitude of God’s creatures in this season. This song reflects on the gifts of God's creation. In the season of harvest, we realized that the art of turning dry seeds into bountiful baskets of food was not ours alone. It reminds us of our dependence with every breath of air, every piece of food, cup of water, ray of heat and light. We cannot provide for ourselves the harvest that God gives through the ecosystem.

An ecosystem is made up of all of the living and nonliving things in an area, interacting as a system. This includes all of the plants, animals, and other living things that make up the communities of life in an area. The ecosystem moderates weather extremes, disperses seeds, purifies air and water, detoxifies and decomposes waste, controls pests, and provides aesthetic beauty. To maintain a healthy ecosystem, balance among all its members and the environment is important. If something disturbs the balance, the ecosystem and all its members may suffer.

Around the globe, the weather is becoming hostile. We are having record numbers of hurricanes, heat waves, floods, and droughts in large part. Of course, we cannot control natural disasters, But there are unnatural problems that result from abusing God’s creation. For example, in October 2004, the Indian subcontinent was flooded by a deadly tidal wave. But one of the reasons for the record number of fatalities in this case was not the wave but the fact that all the mangrove trees along the shoreline, which normally holds back the waves, had been cut down to make way for the white sandy beaches for attracting tourists. As we manipulate nature without regard or concern for its underlying design, we will have to deal with unnatural problems. Global warming can be considered a cause of man-made disasters. Such events happened and will continue to happen.

We believe that God created the world to sustain all living creatures, and in turn to sustain humanity. God designed the ecosystem to function naturally. The earth was designed to sustain every generation’s needs, not to be plundered in an attempt to meet one generation’s wants.

Today, we are going to explore the role of stewardship of God's creation based on the story of creation. Let us look at Genesis 1:28, God blessed them and said to them, “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. **Take charge of (dominion over)** the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground.” The story of creation, we misunderstand the concept of dominion. The common translation “have dominion over” is problematic, because “dominion” is so readily confused with “domination.” In the West since the Renaissance, [Genesis 1:26](#) has been frequently cited to support the project of “conquering,” “dominating,” or “enslaving” nature through science and technology.

However, this was a misinterpretation. For the word “dominion” in Hebrew “*radah*.” It’s a royal word. This is the dominating rule of a king. The same word is used in Psalm 72, originally a coronation psalm for Solomon. Psalm 72: 8, “May he have dominion [*radah*] from sea to sea . . .” And verses 12-14 describes what that dominion, that *radah*, looks like:

He delivers the needy who cry out, the poor, and those who have no helper. He has compassion on the weak and the needy; he saves the lives of those who are in need. He redeems their lives from oppression and violence; their blood is precious in his eyes.(v. 12-14 CEB)

The dominion that God desires is to protect the defenseless and gives justice to the oppressed. Applying this to the command for humanity to exercise dominion over creation, we can see that we are called to rule over creation not in a way to abuse but to guard natural beauty, preserve God's creatures. So, we can interpret Genesis 1:28: **“Be fruitful and have children, filling the earth with your life so that you can have power to fight against everything in it that leads to death. Rule with care and fairness over the natural world, over the myriads of My beautiful creatures – from tropical fish to soaring eagles to dogs and cats – every creature that is a part of this living world.”**

The creation story makes clear that we are meant to be in a relationship to share community with the created order. God evidently desired companionship. So men and women together share life and love and caring for the world. Our essential nature binds us in shared responsibility for each other and the entire created order. We were given permission to use the earth, but not to abuse it. God's earth is only on loan to each generation. God placed these creatures at the service of humans, and we are responsible to take care of them.

The United Methodist Church has long affirmed our individual and collective responsibility to address the unfolding climate crisis. We are called by our faith, informed by science, and led by our relationships with impacted communities to respond with renewed urgency. As we answer this call, we are reminded that God has asked us to take care of creation and be good stewards of natural resources (Genesis 2:15).

Global Ministries provide a Earth Keeper training program for United Methodist clergy and lay leaders to promote environmental stewardship in their communities. The training is designed to support your idea like **Preserving the environment, Promoting environmental care in communities, and Connecting people with God's creation** and help you develop an action plan to make it a reality. We have trained almost 300 United Methodist laity and clergy as Global Ministries EarthKeepers in the last seven years.

**How can we serve God and save the planet? How can we help people today and in the future?
How can we become a better steward of nature?**

I think that if Christians grow in their understanding that God holds us accountable for his creation, we will begin to see positive changes on an unprecedented scale. As a good steward of God's creation, we have faith that the church could become a powerful agent to protect our earth and God's nature.

Let us start from being grateful for God's creation. Many of us have had our most peaceful, happy, and Godly moments while enjoying nature. It is time for us to pay attention to the gifts of the natural world. It's time to love what God has made alive. We need some quiet pause for gratitude for all God gives us so freely, especially through beautiful nature. And you will find that everything around you is a gift from God and we will be grateful for every single God's creature and preserve it and protect it as the steward of God's nature.