

Title: Stewardship

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Texts: Genesis 1.26-31 (Newell paraphrase) Colossians 1.15-20

Series: Pray & Consider: The Accounting of Stewardship

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LISTENING POINTS:

*As we talk about stewardship this morning, I want to make connections to the idea of Earthkeeping, which I define, as living rightly on earth, existing in harmony with all of creation, and practicing environmental care;

*For I believe Earthkeeping is an absolute requirement for 21st Century Christians like us.

*As we are battered by the reality of global warming, we must remember that as people of faith have a resource that is uniquely ours.....

*God's naming us stewards of Creation means that God trusts us to know and do what is right concerning creation.

*God's trust, gives us a boldness for taking action!

*And so, we must ask ourselves what can we realistically do to make a positive and faithful difference for creation?

*Stewardship – which involves restoration, reconciliation and redemption – is vital to our identity as Children of God and Disciples of Jesus!

*Our Colossians lesson is believed to have been used by the early church as a baptismal hymn about the cosmic and reconciling work of Christ the redeemer.

*The author of this letter has adapted an early hymn to help explain to the young church a proper understanding of Jesus, and what he means in their lives.

*Today, this Christ hymn helps us understand the intimate relation between Jesus and Creation.....

*Suggesting why Earthkeeping is not just a nice idea, but an essential part of faithfulness.

Genesis 1.26-31 (paraphrase by J. Philip Newell)

On the sixth days God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image.'

So the wind grew strong over the swelling sea

and from the moist earth humanity was born.

Spirit and flesh were formed in the likeness of God.

Male and Female came forth together.

And the words of heaven were spoken on earth,

'Be fruitful and multiply.

The earth is yours and you are the earth's,

The seeds, the seas, the creatures,

Everything that has breath and every plant that grows.

Be strong in my likeness and guard the unity of life.'

God saw all that had been created and it was very good.
The relationship of earth and woman and man had begun.
And there was evening and morning, creation's sixth day.

Colossians 1:15-20b (NRSV)

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven.....

As we enter
a season of stewardship,
here at First Presbyterian.....

Where we pay particular attention
to how we handle
the resources which God
has entrusted to our care.....

And how we –
as individuals and
as a community –
will share these resources
for the work
of God's Beloved Community
of Heaven on earth.....

In this stewardship season,
I think it is always good
for us to challenge ourselves
to measure our giving
by God's standards.....

That we strive
to give of ourselves
for God's purposes,
as generously and abundantly
as God gives to us.

(LINGER.....)

Now, if our desire
is to imitate God,
then we must first
be clear about
our understanding of God,
and clear about
what our relationship to God
means to us.....

And I think
a fruitful avenue of clarity
about these important matters
comes as we focus
on our calling
to be stewards
of the natural resources around us.....

For how we
nurture and care for
the whole of creation,
which God has entrusted
to our stewardship.....

Says a great deal
about our view of God,
and a great deal
about the kind of relationship
we hope to have with God.

(SLOWLY.....)

The first thing
that is knowable about God
in relation to creation,
is that because

God values creation
and calls it 'good',
we must also value creation,
and embrace its goodness.

Creation is not
an evil entity
that we must strive
to conquer and control.....

Instead, Creation is infused –
every bit of it –
with God's goodness.

The deepest aspect
of every part of Creation –
every human being,
every living creature,
every tree and plant,
and microbe and rock.....

Is God's declaration
that it is good,
and therefore has
meaning and purpose and value!

This is our
starting point with Creation.
The infusion of divine goodness
is the foundation
of our relationship to Creation.....

And because we ourselves
are part of the created order,
God expects us
to be aware of,
and sensitive to,
and careful with
all of Creation.
The second thing

(LINGER.....)

that is knowable about God,
is that goodness
is a reflection of holiness.

Embracing the goodness
of God in creation,
allows us to become aware
of the holiness of creation.

And in this awareness,
God invites us, expects us
to demonstrate appreciation toward creation
with our attitudes
and through our actions.

When something is holy,
we are to approach it with,
and treat it with,
deep respect and extreme care.

Yet, raised as
most of us have been –
with the assumption that Creation
is for our use and enjoyment;
that creation is to serve us.....

It has been
easy to miss
Creation as a holy reflection
of our holy God.

It has been
easy for us
to fail to give Creation
the respect it is due.

(LINGER.....)

Stewardship and Earthkeeping
go hand in hand.

And though our care

for Creation as Earthkeepers
may be initially about use.....

Like enjoying a flower,
or a beautiful vista.....

Our stewardship of creation
will.....or should bring us
well beyond such enjoyment,
to practical acts of labor.....

Like faithfully keeping
what remains of Creation,
and restoring what has been
abused in the past.

The widespread lack of awareness
in our world
about Creation and Creation's integrity
means that we
and many others
have abused and degraded
the environment unknowingly.....

Stewardship means
that we will work
to set things right again –
to reverse abuse,
and to reconcile
and redeem creation.

And, beyond restoration,
stewardship also means serving.

For as we understand
that God through Creation
is serving us,
we will fill compelled
to return this blessing
with service of our own.

Our service will include three things –
1) a loving and caring keeping
of what we hold in trust;
2) providing the creatures
their time of Sabbath rests;
3) and preserving Creation’s fruitfulness.

Ultimately our service to Creation
will even involve entrusting others
with what we have
served, kept and restored” –
our passing on the blessing
to future generations.

(LINGER.....)

I recently read a story
about the ongoing restoration
of the Boardman River
in Traverse City area of Michigan.

One of the stakeholders
in this restoration process
is the First Nation peoples
of the Ottawa
and Chippewa tribes,
who for hundreds of years
have relied on this river
for food, transportation
and spiritual substance.

As part of their partnership
in the restoration project,
they brought their
“ethic of seven generations”
to the decision making process.

Says one tribal leader,
“We look ahead
to seven generations.
We make decisions
based not on today,

but based on
the impact they'll have
in the future.

When you think like this,
and you remember
that you have to honor
seven generations ago,
because somebody thought of you
that far ahead.....

It gives you
a different perspective.
You have to
make decisions today
that are going to be the best
for the future seven generations;
and you have to
carry yourself and show honor
to where you are
in the here and now,
because somebody thought of you.

That's Earthkeeping!

(PAUSE)

Both our scripture lessons
highlight our call to,
and the importance of,
our being faithful Earthkeepers.

The first chapter of Genesis
is a theological declaration
concerning stewardship and Earthkeeping –
“that God and God's creation
are bound together
in a distinctive
and delicate way;
which is the presupposition
for everything that follows
in the Bible.”

The boundness of
Creator and creation,
“is the deepest premise”
of our existence.

God has decided it;
and the connection
cannot be nullified.”

“The word of God
which shapes creation,”
is a declaration about
“the character of God
who is bound to his world,
and about the world
which is bound to God.”

(LINGER.....)

“It is important
for us to note
that of all the creatures
which God creates,
God speaks directly
only to the humans.

We humans are the ones
to whom God has made
a peculiarly intense commitment –
by speaking to us.....

And we are also
the only ones
to whom the marvelous freedom
of response has been granted.”

“The human creature –
you and me.....all of us together,
we attest to God’s goodness
by exercising freedom with
and authority over

all the other creatures
entrusted to our care
as Earthkeepers.

The image of God
within us –
is a mandate of
power and responsibility.

But our divinely given power
is always exercised
as God exercises power;
it is always creative power,
and never coercive or tyrannical power....” (SLOWLY.....)

Our Colossians lesson
builds upon our Genesis lesson.

These six verses
are thought to be
one of the earliest
written statements about Jesus
in the New Testament.

This hymn celebrates
the power and holiness of Jesus
that infuses every aspect of creation.

Jesus is, the poem suggests,
the spiritual DNA
that connects everything in creation;
Jesus, like glue,
holds everything together.

Like ‘the force’
of Star Wars fame,
Jesus is present everywhere.

Because the fullness of God
is pleased to dwell

so richly in Jesus,
we, and every created thing,
carry a bit
of God's fullness within us.

The stewardship we are
called to practice as Earthkeepers
begins with our
recognizing the presence of Jesus
in each other,
and all others,
and in all of creation.

(SLOWLY.....)

To be useful to us
as people of faith,
the rich declarations
about the natures of both
God and Jesus
found in today's scripture lessons.....

Must become concrete actions
in our lives.

If we are to
be and become Earthkeepers
that practice faithful stewardship
in our care of creation,
and in our sharing
of the resources
God has entrusted
to our care.....

I believe we must find
in our God
cause and passion
and urgency for action.....

And we must
also find in Jesus,
who is the Spiritual DNA

which binds everything
in Creation together.....

We must find the motivation
to exist in Creation faithfully –
restoring what has been
abused in the past;
and passing on
to future generations
this amazing gift
that has been entrusted to us.

Certainly like the
Ottawa and Chippewa peoples,
thinking and acting for those
seven generations in the future!

(LINGER.....)

For our spiritual homework this week,
let us focus on two things:

First, let us claim or reclaim
our role and responsibility as Earthkeepers,
and live more intentionally
for the care of Creation.

Climate change is real.
It is crunch time.
But it is not too late
to make a holy difference
if we act with God's
imaginative and creative power,
as we have been
made to do!

And second,
let us set aside time
to pray and consider
how we will share
and what we will share
of the resources

entrusted to our care.

Yes, I do hope
that some of our sharing
will be for the mission
and ministry of this church.

But our stewardship giving
is always about
our understanding of God,
and the expectations upon us
as those made
in God's Earthkeeping image.

Let us all
pray and listen
And dream well!

Amen!!!

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