

Planting Hope: Creation Care Genesis 1:24-31

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I don't generally like borrowing things from other people, mostly because I don't like feeling the weight of responsibility. Know what I mean? I can drive my car all over town and not give it a second thought, but if I've borrowed someone else's car, I'm constantly worried that something is going to happen to it. If I park in a parking lot, I make sure I'm far away from other cars so I don't get a door ding. I tend to drive slower and I'm much more mindful about what the cars around me are doing. Feeling the weight of responsibility for someone else's stuff just makes me live differently, more carefully.

We're in a worship series called Planting Hope. We're talking about the mission that we've been given as followers of Jesus to care for this world. And there's a name for this mission, this work that we're called and equipped to do as followers of Jesus. It's called Stewardship. Stewardship means being charged with caring for someone else's stuff. That's why we feed the hungry, heal the sick, and do justice for those who are oppressed. Because all people belong to God, and God has charged us to steward them, to care for them on God's behalf.

But that isn't just true of people. That's also true of this incredible creation we call planet earth. Psalm 24 says, *"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it."* In other words, this big blue ball on which we live is God's, and as we'll learn from today's scripture reading, we've been charged with caring for it, with stewarding it. It's one of the many ways in which we plant hope in others.

Like so many things these days, conversations around climate change and environmental stewardship have become political. And that leads some people to believe that it has no place in church. But long before politicians ever talked about the weather, God talked to humanity about caring for the earth. In fact, according to the biblical story, one of the first

commands God ever gave to humans was to steward well this planet that we call home. You'll hear that call in today's scripture reading from Genesis chapter 1.

²⁴ Then God said, "Let the earth produce every sort of animal, each producing offspring of the same kind—livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground, and wild animals." And that is what happened. ²⁵ God made all sorts of wild animals, livestock, and small animals, each able to produce offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."

²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."

²⁹ Then God said, "Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. ³⁰ And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life." And that is what happened.

³¹ Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good! And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day.

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Conversation about climate change and stewardship of creation has become so politicized in the last few years that many of us have lost sight of the biblical roots of God's call to care for this creation-in-crisis. And make no mistake, God's amazing creation is in crisis. Did you know that 50,000 species of plants, animals and insects become extinct each year, largely due to deforestation? Did you know that a conservative estimate by the scientific community projects that by 2050 over 570 cities and over 800 million people will be negatively impacted by rising sea levels due to global warming? Did you know that 40% of our lakes and waterways in Minnesota are so polluted that they

don't meet basic health standards? And that's just the tip of the rapidly melting iceberg.

This isn't merely an environmental crisis; it's a spiritual crisis. And it isn't just a political issue; it's a faith issue. In the beginning God commanded humanity, "Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground." An older translation called humanity to have "dominion" over the earth. What's important to note about that command is that when God calls us to "reign" over this planet, God means that we're called to steward it, not dominate it, use and abuse it. When someone lends me their car they aren't saying, "Hey, do whatever you want with it. Use it and abuse it. Don't worry about damaging it." Of course not! They are graciously allowing me to use what is theirs and they trust that I'd steward it well. And the very same thing holds true of the Creator entrusting this creation into our care. We're privileged to use it, enjoy, get to know the Creator through it. But we are also called to steward it well. To care for it and heal it.

As a child I was fascinated by nature, and so I loved watching shows like "The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau" and "Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom." Do you remember those shows? If you do, you'll know that both of them had a bit of a bent toward protecting the environment. I can remember getting upset seeing fish and sea birds dying because they'd gotten trapped in plastic waste thrown into the ocean, or hearing stories of entire species of beautiful animals threatened with extinction because their habitats were being destroyed. But that's where it stopped for me...merely being upset. I never made the connection between my own behavior and personal choices, and the things I was seeing on those television programs.

And I think that's still true for many of us as adults. We hear news of drought and more frequent tornadoes and hurricanes, or the pollution levels of our lakes and rivers and it upsets us, but we aren't necessarily moved to action. We don't always see the connection between our individual choices and actions, or our choices and actions as a congregation, and the larger story of caring for God's world. Fortunately, there's a group of Christ-followers here at Prince of Peace who do see the connection and are passionate about helping the rest of us to see it to. It's our Care for Creation Team.

[Video interview with Chris Erickson from the Care for Creation Team.]

I am so grateful for Christ-followers like Chris and the members of our Care for Creation team, who are helping and encouraging us to more faithfully respond to God's call to steward this world in which we live, as a foundation for providing hope and wholeness to all people.

I confess, friends, that this is not an area of stewardship that I have given enough focus to, both personally and as a leader here at Prince of Peace. But that's going to change. And you'll begin to see and hear and experience those changes in our life together.

For instance, in the very near future, we are going to eliminate the use of styrofoam cups on weekends, and hopefully, from use on our campus entirely. Why? Because styrofoam is a significant cause of toxic waste that leaches into our soil and water and our air. It can't be recycled, it isn't biodegradable. And so it takes about 500 years to degrade in a landfill. Think about that. If I drink a cup of coffee today in a styrofoam cup, throw it in the garbage, where it's eventually buried in a landfill, that cup won't degrade until the year 2522. It's mindboggling. That's a simple reminder to me that seemingly small choices that I make on a daily basis make a real impact upon the earth. And they say something about my response to God's call to steward God's creation.

If you want to join me in learning how you can do more to care for creation, not as a political statement but as a show of faith and devotion to our creator God, then let me challenge you to text the word CREATION to 270-330-8350 and we'll send you a resource with helpful suggestions that can make a difference.

Unlike my friend, Chris, I don't have grandkids, yet. But I hope to. And while I plan to buy them gifts and spoil them rotten, one of the greatest gifts I can give them is a healthy world in which to live. A place where they can grow in hope and in wholeness for a lifetime.