



4.21.24 A Special Responsibility | Genesis 1:28-31, Genesis 9:8-17

Have you thought recently about what your mom and dad passed on to you? What to value in life?

As we engage with this series on God's creation, the earth and its wildlife, and our role as stewards and caretakers; I have been thinking about my dad a lot.

At first, I kept asking myself, "**Why am I thinking about my dad so much?**" And then the light bulb came on!

In very simple ways, my dad passed on to me a love of nature.

He loved being in creation, being outside in a variety of ways and simply lived that out. For me I grew in my love for God's creation in ways that were more caught than taught.

It's ironic really, that my dad, who was a very good professor...very good, taught me to cherish and celebrate and enjoy nature without a single lecture or lesson plan.

I realize this connection to nature was my dad's pragmatic wisdom distilled down to me. It's my dad's gift to me.

That when I think, "**...it just makes sense to care for the earth that in turn sustains us all.**" That thinking came from my dad.

My dad grew up on a dairy farm and loved hunting and fishing. He loved being outside gardening, planting flowers and fruit trees, and landscaping.

After he retired, he became quite a prolific wildlife photographer. He travelled all over the United States, different state parks, to get that perfect wildlife shot.

Loving nature just flowed from the life he lived.

I grew up in the country, on a lake. So, I grew up loving all things water. Loving all the lake stuff that goes with it, like skipping rocks, wading around looking for pretty rocks, listening to the loons...

fishing, watching sunsets, boating...

...fishing, snorkeling, more fishing, and canoeing.

So, it shouldn't surprise you, one of the first times I had a sense of being a part of God's amazing creation was when I was standing in a lake.

A time when I felt a part of God's beautiful creation, felt connected to things way bigger than me, is a time related to water.

It was when I was standing in Big Bass Lake and I was maybe 9 years old?

It was a blisteringly beautiful summer day! The sun was high in the sky and bright. I was standing in warm, clear, clean lake water, digging my toes into 100% sand.

Cleaning out my little rowboat. Very similar to this picture...but red.

When all of a sudden, I had a moment.

A moment when all the pieces fell into place. I felt connected and perfectly interdependent on everything, with nature and connected to myself and connected to God/with God.

This sense of awe filled me, a deep sense of well-being, calm but really happy, a deep joy filled me. I remember pausing.

I loved where I was standing and what I was doing. I enjoyed being responsible and taking care of my boat and making sure my garbage didn't land in the lake.

Amazing, memorable. It's been 45 years. That perfect moment standing in water!

And if I had grown up in a church, going to Sunday School, participating in Early Word.

I would have jumped at the chance to become a "water protector"! Loved our Caldecott winning story for today, grateful to Andrea for passing on to the kids...water stewardship. Soo good!!

I know that my experience of nature might not match your experience. But it's okay because you have your own wonderful experiences.

Did you grow up going to visit your grandparents for a couple of weeks in the summer to ride horses? Or rent a place on a lake and learned how to water ski?

Maybe you grew up camping and eating Smores? Or did you grow up hunting and fishing, doing your part to keep the deer population healthy?

With the recent eclipse, maybe you grew up star gazing and watching the meteor showers? Sensing God's nearness by gazing at the majesty of the Milky Way?

When you came to church this morning, did you notice our gloriously flowering magnolia tree? Our Confirmation kids met around our bonfire pit on Wednesday! It was wonderful!

We celebrate so many different ways of connecting to and enjoying the great outdoors.

Through our hobbies and past times connected to nature, we pour out our care. We find our care and attention is poured out to the earth. And nature responds in like manner, sustaining, inspiring, and renewing us.

No matter what our experiences in nature or maybe what our dads passed on to us about loving nature; our Heavenly Father has much to say to us.

Part of me wrestled this week with these passages, "Don't we already know all of this?" It isn't safe to assume what we know. And I realize I am growing deeper in these truths.

This is currently where the Lord is active in my life. And I am so grateful!

Good to review these important truths about the earth and all living creatures, and our special responsibility in all of that.

We learn from Genesis chapter 1, that it was on the last day of God creating, that humanity is brought forth along with all other living creatures.

And when God looked at humans, the earth, and all the animals...God didn't proclaim that we were just "good". No.

No, we were not as Minnesotans might say, "not bad".

No, God celebrated by saying, we were "very good"!

We are "very good"!

And as humans, we were intentionally created, created to reflect God's character in the world, and given important tasks. This is part of where a soul learns its worth. Where we come from and how we are valued and cherished.

Then in verse 28 we receive our purpose. In verse 28 we learn about our important task. We are blessed and commissioned. We receive our special responsibility, this stewardship of all of God's good work.

When we read...

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

The beauty and resources of the created world are gifted to us, on loan, to aid humanity in our work of filling the earth and growing the human family.

In helping God’s Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

What a wonderful calling we have!

But we do have to talk a little about a couple of words that have been historically problematic...”subdue” and “have dominion”. Those words are challenging.

Sometimes those words have seemingly given humans permission to exert some level of violence or harshness, to disrespect and be destructive to our natural resources.

At times leading to over harvesting from the earth, taking too many trees from the forest, too many fish from the seas, excessive strip mining, just to name a few.

Thankfully, we have grown as a people, grown as a responsible global community. Acknowledging we are all living on the same planet.

We know our special responsibility, our role in creation is one of being a “protector”, one of “stewardship” and “caretaking” and not exploitation.

In Genesis chapter 6, over time God had watched the earth and humanity become corrupt enough to destroy.

But what did God do? Destroy everything, chalk it up as a failed experiment? Did God give up and walk away shaking his head? Would we blame him?

No, God chose to preserve human and non-human life through Noah and his faithful obedience. God’s heart is to save. God saved humanity, the wild animals, and restored balance in nature.

In Genesis chapter 9, God then made a covenant or holy promise to Noah. God comforted Noah and us. God promised Noah and his descendants and every living creature and all future generations...to never again make the waters become a flood to kill all living creatures on the earth.

And considering some of the rain that fell last Tuesday, it was good to know...we are not having another flood.

How do we know God won’t flood the earth again?

Because God gave us rainbows in the sky. Rainbows are visible proof of the covenant made by God. Every time it rains we look for rainbows and celebrate God’s salvation!

When I was in Hawaii, I had a unique run in with this rainbow. This rainbow enveloped me, as I stood on an overlook to an active volcano. Never been inside a rainbow before! I was baptized by a rainbow!

In these early chapters of Genesis, we see God doing two things.

We see God's goodness and the abundance given to us. Humans are gifted with bounteous good food and the natural resources we need to thrive.

And, we hear the very special responsibility of humanity to make sure that every beast, bird, and creeping thing mentioned in Genesis' first chapter, has access to what it needs to survive and thrive.

God is soo good!

We even see God's goodness, God's care and our responsibility over all is also imaged in the New Testament. We need to loop this all back to our Risen Lord and the new creation.

The resurrection appearances of Jesus often pictures the disciples "at the table" in Mark or specifically sharing in a meal in Luke and John.

A shared meal symbolizing God's perfect Kingdom, over all, with abundance for all. Harkening back to the lush Garden of Eden, still under God's perfect reign.

In the new creation where resurrection changes everything sorrowful, heals all that has been broken...including humans AND the earth, we see more of God's goodness.

We see evidence that God has not vacated the earth or walked away in defeat. But instead, God continues - daily! - through the Holy Spirit and the spirited-filled Church to make bountiful provision for all.

And God continues - daily - to invite us to take up and mature in our special responsibility to care for the earth and all living things.

How do we, like Noah, join God in faithful obedience in caring for the earth?

How do we, like Jesus and the first disciples, reflect this new creation to others...that humanity and nature is interdependent, and all is meant to be cherished and respected?

May God guide us, may God give us strength and inspiration to live more into our roles as water protectors, animal caretakers and earth stewards this week. Amen.

Time of Reflection: Looking for support and encouragement in being stewards of the earth? What is another step you can take to embrace our special responsibility?

Don't forget our new group forming called Spirituality in Nature Group, starting Thursday, May 2nd. Community, connecting to God in nature, advocating for the earth. Simply bring your questions and wonderings to God in prayer, "Lord, how can I grow in my role as a steward of this earth?"