

1 Today we continue our journey together of reclaiming stewardship as a joyful, life-long calling. Last week I shared this definition of stewardship: “Stewardship is receiving God’s gifts gratefully, cherishing and tending them in a responsible and accountable manner, sharing them in justice and love with others, and returning them with increase to the Lord.”¹ Our stewardship in God’s kingdom begins and ends with God, not us. If we can learn to recognize that, then the part we play in between can be marked with joy.

Every story of stewardship has the potential to be told as a “glass half empty story,” a story of how we’ve fallen short in some way in our stewardship of God’s gifts. Instead of that, let’s remember that in the face of our human failings, God has consistently brought about restoration, wholeness, and healing. Regardless of how we might have failed in the past, God is inviting each one of us to start anew and claim the joyful journey of becoming better stewards of God’s gracious gifts. Let that journey begin today!

2 We continue our celebration this morning with the stewardship of creation. That covers a lot of territory! Astronomers estimate that it’s about forty-eight billion light years from where we are to the edge of the known universe.² For today, let’s focus in a little closer to home and consider only the earth. The surface of the earth alone covers a staggering 122 billion acres, with about a third of that dry land.³ In addition to the nearly 8 billion people,⁴ imagine how many plants and animals live on this planet. Biodiversity and Conservation magazine estimates that the world population of birds alone is between 200 and 400 billion.⁵ Wow! Isn’t God’s creation breathtakingly enormous! To think that God would give us responsibility for tending this creation is almost too much to believe.

Many of you know Willard Krietlow, a beloved member of our congregation. What you might not know about Willard is that he served on the Wright County Soil & Water Conservation Board for 43 years and was a cofounder of the park system in Wright County. Willard has a passion for the stewardship of creation and I’ll be sharing some of his

¹ http://stdunstan.ca/linked/the_difference_between_joyful_giving_and_stewardship.pdf

² <https://phys.org/news/2015-10-big-universe.html>

³ <https://www.newstatesman.com/global-issues/2011/03/land-queen-world-australia>

⁴ <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/>

⁵ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1018341530497>

reflections later in the message. First, I invite Jerry Ford, Willard's son-in-law, to come and share about his stewardship of the small portion of the earth's 37 billion acres of land that God has blessed him with.

Good morning, fellow children of God. Our farm does not have a mortgage. Thanks to the excellent stewardship of Willard Krietlow, my father-in-law, the farm hasn't had one in decades. We don't have a mortgage, but we do have a loan. God has loaned us the land, and asked us to take care of it for Him. And it's an odd kind of loan: he doesn't want us to pay Him back. Instead, He wants us to pay it forward. Just as my wife, Marienne's, ancestors paid it forward to Willard's parents, and they to him, and he is paying it forward to us, we are planning to pay it forward to another generation who will continue to care for the land with the same conservation and sustainability ethic that we hold dear.

And another odd thing about this loan from God: he wants us to pay dividends. Again, not to Him, but to all of you. He wants us to care for the soil so that we can grow good food for you to eat. He wants us to conserve the water so to that we can all enjoy cleaner rivers, lakes and oceans. He wants us to care for the air, sequestering carbon in our soil so that maybe we can help to offset some of this climate change. He wants us to pay those dividends to you – our community.

So, what do we get out of this? We get a very interesting and adventurous way to make a living. We get to live on God's land. And we get to see the Land Lord everyday. If I may take a little liberty with one of my favorite old hymns – and I do love those old hymns: "This is my Father's world, He shines in all that's here; In the pasture grass I hear him pass: He speaks to me everywhere." Thank you, and may God bless.

3 There's a poet by the name of Wendel Berry that Willard turned me onto through his writings. He wrote this poem entitled "A Timbered Choir." I love the way it captures the holiness of creation.

Slowly, slowly, they return to the small woodland let alone:

Great trees, outspreading and upright, apostles of the living light.

Patient as stars, they build in air tier after tier a timbered choir,

Stout beams upholding weightless grace of song, a blessing on this place.

They stand in waiting all around, uprisings of their native ground,

Downcomings of the distant light; They are the advent they await.

Receiving sun and giving shade, their life's a benefaction made.

And is a benediction said over the living and the dead.

In fall their brightened leaves, released, fly down the wind, and we are pleased

To walk on radiance, amazed. O light come down to earth, be praised!⁶

Have you ever stood in a forest and looked up at the trees and been overcome with a sense of awe and wonder? I know that I need to do that from time to time in order to feel whole, connected with God’s creation. Or have you sat on the shore of Lake Superior and listened to the sound of the water lapping against the rocky shore? If good stewardship begins with gratefully receiving God’s good gifts, then it’s actually our responsibility to stop from time to time and allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the beauty of God’s creation. Stewardship of the earth is not an abstract concept- it’s intensely personal and concrete, intersecting our lives through the air that we take in with each breath, the water we drink and bathe in, and the earth we walk on each day. When was the last time you stopped long enough in your day to notice the beauty of this earth and then cry out to God: “O light come down to earth, be praised!”

4 Willard Krietlow offered this observation about the intimacy and imperative of our care of God’s creation in a 1997 address to his church:

We are formed from the dust of the earth. When God lovingly created the first person from the dust by the riverbank, arranging the myriad chemicals and minerals and neutrons and protons that compose this planet he had created, humankind came into being. There is nothing physical in us that is foreign to earth, nothing that wasn't here first in the land, air and water. Truly, we are the land, and it is ours. We have been here since Creation occurred, this marvelous creation from which we spring, and to which we

⁶ Wendel Berry, A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997, “Slowly, slowly, they return...”

all return. God's recycling is as it must be if life is to go on continuously on this earth. We have been given the privilege of being able to comprehend and share in this miracle of creation. We are able to praise the Creator, to glory in God's greatness, to marvel at the richness and diversity of the life forms that spring from the same creation that we do; and we are given the privilege of being God's stewards and caretakers of these miracles. How can we possibly not be concerned with the care of creation?

5 There are so many ways to grow in your stewardship of creation each and every day, some of them things you might never have thought of as being stewardship. I'm guessing by now that all of us have heard the slogan "Recycle, Reduce, Reuse," which should really be in a different order: "Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle."⁷ Every day we're presented with choices about the kinds and amounts of resources we'll take for ourselves and what we'll leave for someone else. That includes water, electricity, food, soil, clean air, and even the land we live on. Little choices we make, like eating our leftovers or shutting off our idling car engines can make big differences over our lifetimes and across our communities and the world. Check out the website at www.EPA.gov/recycle for some great ideas for how you can be a better steward of the earth.

Beyond the three "Rs," what else might you do? You could become a United Methodist Earthkeeper. Earthkeepers are:

United Methodists who are aware of the ecological challenges in our world today and feel called to be part of a movement to transform the world. They can be laity or clergy, students, part-time or full-time workers, or retirees. Earthkeepers will participate in four days of intensive training in creation care theology and community organizing, and then commit to 10 hours per month of providing leadership for a community project or advocacy campaign.⁸

I've met some of the clergy and lay people in the Minnesota Annual Conference who have a vibrant passion for creation care and are leading efforts in their congregations and communities to rediscover the joy of becoming good stewards of God's creation. God seems

⁷ Willard Krietlow, Temple Talk, St. Johns Lutheran Church, 1996.

⁸ <https://www.epa.gov/recycle>

<http://www.umcmission.org/learn-about-us/news-and-stories/2016/april/0422newearthkeepers>

to be doing a new work of grace through them. How about you? How about us? The next Earthkeepers training event is at Northern Pines, October 19-22. You can Google “United Methodist Earthkeepers” to learn more.

6 Stewardship of God’s creation is a journey of joy. Willard expressed it this way in another address from 1992:

We must be watchful and aware of God's gifts of sharing the earth's blessings, sustenance and beauty. What a privilege to pause, give thanks each time some good befalls us or our loved ones or our neighbors, when justice is done and the poor are provided for, and the music bursts forth, and beauty surrounds us, and Creation is honored. The more I search for things to be thankful for, the more I find myself thanking and praising the Lord¹⁰

Now that’s what I’m talking about when I say that stewardship is supposed to be a joyful journey. “The more I search for things to be thankful for, the more I find myself thanking and praising the Lord.” Don’t you want to be a part of that journey? You can be, you know- overcome with gratitude for the goodness God pours into your life. But like all things, this requires that we stop long enough in our headlong rush through each day to reflect and deliberate on how we will faithfully discharge our duties as God’s stewards.

Please join your hearts with mine, as we close with a prayer attributed to Chief Yellow Lark of the Lakota, in 1887. I’ve changed only two words to contextualize it to our Christian worship. Let us pray.

Oh, [Holy] Spirit, whose voice I hear in the winds and whose breath gives life to all the world, hear me. I am small and weak. I need your strength and wisdom. Let me walk in beauty and make my eyes ever behold the red and purple sunset. Make my hands respect the things you have made and my ears sharp to hear your voice. Make me wise so that I may understand the things you have taught my people. Let me learn the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock.

I seek strength, not to be superior to my brother, but to fight my greatest enemy - myself. Make me always ready to come to you with clean hands and straight eyes, so when life fades, as the fading sunset, my spirit will come to you without shame.¹¹ [Amen]

¹⁰ Willard Krietlow, Temple Talk, St. Johns Lutheran Church, 1992.

¹¹ www.worldprayers.org



Buffalo United Methodist Church

...serving people for Jesus Christ so that we all may know joy!



**609 8th Street NW
Buffalo, MN 55313
763-682-3538**

Bill Reinhart, Pastor
pastorbill@buffaloumc.com