

Rev. Estelle Margarones, First Parish Church, 6/7/2020
Genesis 1:20-2:4

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. We often take it for granted that God spoke the world into being. What God said, happened. So today, I want to encourage you at the outset to notice how you speak and what words you use.

What are you saying to others? How do you talk to yourself? (That's particularly important for those that live alone because someone else may not hear any put down or negativity. Speech is one of those ways that we convey concepts and ideas to others. And our speech can also bring things into being. (How many of you have gone out and purchased a new home without ever once saying out loud that you wanted a new house? Speech is powerful. So God created the world out of a watery chaos. Not just that, but we're told, that God saw that it was good.

In the beginning, it was all good. It is still good today in some places and for some of God's creatures and some of God's creation.

Something that I've been wrestling with for days is the translation of a few words and how they inform our understanding of our place in the world. One of the words in question is 'radah' which can be translated as 'dominion' and the other word is 'kabah' which can be translated as 'subdue'. Both of these words can also be understood through a lens of 'stewardship'. Dominion means to have power over. Stewardship means to be a caretaker of. Are we subduing or are we cultivating and caring for the diverse biosystems God provided? Are we to use resources as we will or are we to nurture, protect, and preserve?

What do you think God intended? And how does the current state of our world feel in light of the stewardship lens? How do your Christian values impact your everyday speech and action?

1:20 And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." 21 So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 God blessed them, saying, "Be

fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” 23 And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

Those of you who have had the chance to enjoy a peaceful time of birdwatching may have noticed that more formerly southern birds are coming further north. According to the Audubon Society, “Two-thirds of North American birds are at increasing risk of extinction from global temperature rise.” (Audubon.org/climate/survivalbydegrees)

And you may remember a particularly disturbing story from a couple of years back about a young, underweight sperm whale that washed up on a beach in Spain. Since this type of whale is an endangered species, there was an autopsy and it was found that it died from ingesting 64 pounds of plastic trash. There were garbage bags, fish nets, plastic bottles and even a plastic drum in it's digestive system. Because the whale couldn't process or eliminate the plastic, it developed an abdominal infection that led to its death.

A study published by the Scientific Reports journal found that the Great Pacific Garbage Patch is growing exponentially. You've surely heard of this floating trash heap between California and Hawaii, but did you know twice the size of Texas?

1:24 And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. 25 God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

But the creeping animals are disappearing. In 2016, the World Wildlife Fund found that between 1970 and 2012 (just 42 years), global populations of fish, birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles declined by 58%. Right now, experts estimate that between 200 and 2,000 species go extinct every year...and that is, at minimum, 1,000 times the natural extinction rate. (wwf.panda.org)

1:26 Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have stewardship(radah) over the fish of the

sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

For those of us hearing or reading this today, there may be some confusion. Let ‘us’ make man in ‘our’ image. Perhaps this refers to the Trinity-Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Perhaps it refers to a redacted counterpart. In Biblical times, male gods had female counterparts or consorts. Perhaps it refers to facets of God that we can’t even conceptualize. But one thing is for sure, God made humankind: male and female—and like every other part of creation, God made humankind with great diversity.

1:28 God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and steward (kabah) it; and have (radah) stewardship over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” 29 God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. 31 God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

According to NASA, the sea level, global temperature, and greenhouse gas carbon dioxide are all up and levels of ice sheets and polar caps are down (Climate.NASA.gov) The most troubling thing about it is that we, who the Bible tells us were given stewardship of the earth and the waters and the creatures. We, created in God's likeness, are causing it. Because instead of living in harmony with all that God created, instead of living as stewards of all of God’s creation, we have put ourselves at the center of it and assumed over generations, that we are in charge and that all must be subservient to our will. (Not God’s will.) While that is regrettable news, there is good news. Just as God used God’s voice to create order out of chaos, we have that opportunity. Right here. Right now. Each of us can step up and take our place as the trusted caretakers. We can speak up and say that what we see happening in the world today is *not* good. There are things that each one of us can do to right the wrongs and to keep from causing more

damage. This is an interdependent world.

Take, for example, the very air that you breathe. It makes up about a fifth of our atmosphere. According to the Smithsonian, “...most of the oxygen you breathe comes from organisms in the ocean.” From “marine photosynthesizers, like phytoplankton and seaweed. Both use carbon dioxide, water and energy from the sun to make food for themselves, releasing oxygen in the process” ...and it happens in the ocean. (<https://ocean.si.edu/ocean-life/plankton/every-breath-you-take-thank-ocean>). You may not have ever thought that you had something in common with seaweed. Even more, you may not have realized how beneficial it is to you. This is an interconnected world.

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. 2 And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. 4 These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

By being of service, we are actively worshipping God. We're putting our faith into action when we say and do things to restore all the world to the way God would have it be.

In the beginning, God created the world and it was good. It can be so again. For all of God's creation, everywhere. But there has been serious damage done, over generations. So it's no longer enough for us to passively just not inflict any further damage ourselves. We have to actively engage in repairing, restoring, and reconciling all of God's creation.

We have an opportunity, right now, to make this a truly transformational time. We need to examine constructs that we've taken for granted for a long time. You have a choice about how to respond to the state of God's world today. Each of us has a responsibility to God. That's made up of response and ability. What will you say? What will you do?

Know that God will see your efforts to restore God's creation. And behold, it will be very good. Blessed be and amen.