

Faithful Care: For Creation

a sermon
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Psalm 8

Last week I said that I was starting a three week series of sermons on stewardship.

Only three?

I'm sure that I could take more than three weeks to do this. There's so much that could be said, so many aspects of stewardship that can be explored.

And probably should.

Some day.

As the great poet-philosopher Winnie the Pooh said, "It's a long story, and even longer when I tell it."

But three weeks is what I've set — three weeks is what I've got — so I'm sticking to it!

As I said last week, I have a simple definition of "stewardship." Stewardship is "faithful care."

Faithful care?

Yes, faithful care:

God gives us gifts, and God expects us to care for these gifts. We show that we are faithful to God when we take care of what we have been given. Just as God entrusts us with many blessings, so are we to show we are worthy of that trust in how we treat these blessings. We are faithful to God, and we live out our faith *in* God, to a great extent by caring for what God has given us to care for.

Stewardship is just faithful care.

Now, "faithful care" sounds simple. Only two words. A nice, short summary of our stewardship responsibilities.

And, in some ways, it is. Simple, that is.

But even though it might be *simple*, it is not *easy*. Because, we tend to think that what we have under our care *belongs* to us.

Food: ours.

Homes: ours.

Backyards: ours.

Jobs: ours.

Cars: ours.

Toys and tools. They are *ours*. Or so we think.

My time.

My money.

My friends.

Are these just things we say? Or in saying them have we let slip that we have slipped

into understanding these as belonging to us,

treating these as under us,
placing these around us,
we the sun,
and they our planets —

have we?

Do we forget that we belong to each other, even as we all, they and us, belong to God?

Yes, stewardship as faithful care is not easy.

Because we are afraid.

We fear the passing of time.

We are terrified by the threat of death.

We are haunted by loss, and troubled by regret.

In response, we try today to secure our tomorrows, showing that we do not really trust God to be there when tomorrow comes. Which calls into question whether we really believe that God is here today.

Out of our lack of faith, we acquire more and more things. We try to accumulate enough, more than enough, so that when the rainy day comes, we'll be all set.

We consume more and more,

hardly considering
the impact of our consuming
on other people,
other creatures,
the land
and the seas
and the sky.

How has that worked out?

Most are just as uncertain, just as insecure. While oceans rise, and hurricanes increase in number and intensity, and droughts deepen, and red tides spread, and rain forests are decimated.

Again, how has that worked out? How's it going, this self-centered overconsumption?



The psalm we all read together beautifully sings of God's glory shown in the created order. It does this as a prayer, all of it spoken, or sung, directly to God, the only psalm that does this, using each verse to speak right to God.

I love this psalm.

I love how it expresses such joy in the beauty of creation. I love how it gives voice to such awe that we are part of it.

But not just *part* of creation! The psalm declares astonishment that God favors us, among all creatures, so much.

*Then I ask, "Why do you care
about us humans?
Why are you concerned
for us weaklings?"
You made us a little lower
than you yourself,
and you have crowned us
with glory and honor.*

(Psalm 8:4–5, CEV)

The psalmist knows. We are not worthy of such honor.
The psalmist is certain. We are not deserving of such attention.
Even so, the psalmist has no doubt, God *does* honor us. We *do* have a place in God's plans.
All this is not something to brag about. Instead, it prompts both humility and praise.
The astonishment continues, and the praise persists. Because the high honor God gives us carries with it an elevated status with regard to creation:

*You let us rule everything
your hands have made.
And you put all of it
under our power—
the sheep and the cattle,
and every wild animal,
the birds in the sky,
the fish in the sea,
and all ocean creatures.*

(Psalm 8:6–8)

Amazing! All creatures are under our power!
Astonishing! God let's "us rule everything [God's] hands have made!"
But this, too, is not something to brag about. This, too, prompts humility and praise.
And from that humility and praise, flowing from them and deeply entwined with them, is *stewardship*. The perspective on our God-given place *in* the created order leads to an expectation of responsible care *for* the created order.



Here's the thing. No one can truly pray this psalm, no one could sincerely and meaningfully and truthfully speak to God such thanksgiving and praise and awe and wonder as expressed in this psalm, while also treating birds and beasts, forests of trees and fields of grain, oceans and rivers, as our play-things to use and abuse and rape and pillage and destroy.
Yet many Christians, it seems, do. And that is a shame.
Actually, it's more than a shame.
It's sin.

It's faithlessness.

It's betrayal.

It show an absence of gratitude, a lack of thankfulness.

It shows that their faith is shallow, or may be gone.

It shows that they do not trust in God, not really, not practically, not actively.

It shows that they have closed their ears to the humility and joy of this psalm.

And not only of this psalm. They have chosen not to hear the humble joy and joyful humility expressed throughout the Bible, especially in the life and teaching of the Lord Jesus.

It shows that they have turned Christian faith into a disembodied spirituality,

separating soul and body,
inner and outer,
believing and doing,
salvation and creation,
family and stranger,
us and them.

In that they have not cared *for* creation, this shows that they do not really care *about* creation, *God's* creation.

Do they, then, really care for *God*?



We soon will gather at the table and celebrate Christ's holy supper.

On this World Communion Sunday, we do well to consider that we celebrate with sisters and brothers in Christ from every land and nation.

The Holy Spirit joins us together in holy communion. In Christ, differences of language, race, politics, and economic systems are overcome and overruled. In Christ, we are one people, one commonwealth, one body.

Even if we don't see it.

Even if we don't feel it.

But feel it and see it we should. And can. Not just once a year, but every time we are fed the body and blood of Christ.

And as we join in this feast, we may again see that our physical well-being, our embodiment, is bound up with that of our fellow Christians in other lands. And theirs with ours.

In our eating and drinking of communion bread and wine, we may again notice that our choices of food and drink here can impact the mealtimes of brothers and sisters many miles away.

As we are reminded of Christ's great love for us in the sharing of his body and blood, we may recall that our gratitude is well expressed in our faithful care

for water and air,
for plants and soil,
for harvests and livestock,

the shared bounty of the earth:

all of it gift,
all of it grace,
none of it our possession,
the gifts of God for the people of God.



My sisters and brothers, as God has cared for you, may you be eager to care faithfully for creation.

And now,

*To Jesus Christ, who loves us
and freed us from our sins by his blood
and made us to be a kingdom,
priests of his God and Father,
to him be glory and dominion forever and ever.
Amen.*

(—from Revelation 1:5-6, NRSV)