

Albany Presbyterian Church

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Michelle Shin

Being in nature is a beautiful reminder of how God wants to meet us in and through his creation. When we feel tired, stressed, overwhelmed, and heavy-hearted by the complexity of life and the world in nature, contemplating his creation can lift our spirits and find God revealed in various ways.

Genesis 1 is a creation story that tells us that God created the heavens, earth, and everything in them. It is not your typical scientific account of the world's creation, like the Big Bang or the theory of evolution. Nevertheless, the biblical creation story has profound meaning as a spiritual narrative explaining how God created the world and everything in relationship with himself. God is the creator, and we are the creation, bound in a spiritual connection. It tells us of our relationship as creatures to all others of God's creation. And how we are all interconnected, as St Francis puts it, as a family of God. This relationship narrative is an integral part of our story, our whakapapa.

This is the idea behind the seasons of creation when churches around the globe dedicate their time to pray for the creation. This was to reframe our thinking by freshly reading the Bible and recognize our past wrongs that may have influenced our stewardship of natural resources and how they have contributed to the pollution, deforestation, overfishing, and irresponsible hunting of animals, leading to species extinction. In 1989, the churches first came together to make September 1st the World Day of Prayer for Creation and for the subsequent four weeks to think about how we might better care for God's creation and appreciate his blessings and promise or covenant that God has made with us.

Genesis 1: 26-28 and 2:7-15 we read this morning, remind us how we, humanity, were created by God, who made all things in heaven and earth and water, seeing everything to be good and that God blesses them all in verse 21, blessed to grow, to prosper and multiply. And with the same blessing, God blesses the man and woman created in his image. He says the same.

“Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and every living creature that moves on the ground.” Genesis 1:28

It is amazing how this single verse in the book of Genesis has become used to justify what we know now to be such a wrong way of thinking about the world and our attitude toward them. The two words, in particular, subdue and rule dominion; many have argued that the ecological disasters we experienced through the Industrial Revolution, deforestation, exploitation, and pollution of the water and the earth in the West come from this old Judeo-Christian theology of somehow misinterpreting this verse or these two words.

How we read this verse and understood these words made it sound like God created the earth, sky, and seas only for us and our benefit. We have a divine mandate to subdue and tame all creation for our use and rule over, dominate, and conquer it all for our benefit.

A closer study of this passage in recent times has opened us to a different way of thinking from how we used to. For example, “Subdue” in Hebrew, Kabash was understood to mean overwhelmed, overpower, oppress, and subjugate, which led to exploitation, destruction, and overuse of its resources. By putting them in its context, we now know that this word may be better understood to mean what you do to work the garden: breaking the ground, tilting the soil, airing, and manuring to make the ground productive. In Theological Workbook of the Old Testament, Harris Laird says, “The word: Subdue in verse 28 implies that creation will not do our bidding gladly or quickly and that we must now bring creation into submission. It is not to rule but to make it fruitful and multiply. The trouble is some want to use the same subjugation on others. A twistedness in humanity causes us to perform such a task with fierce and destructive delight. But the word subdue is not that, as the same word was used in Micah 7:1 says. God subdues our iniquities to give life. This means the meaning of the word subdue is **to give life, not to take it away. It is to grow, not to destroy, but to make it bear fruit and live in abundance.**

Likewise, the word Dominion, or rule, in Hebrew is radar. The word radar means the dominion of the king. However, the dominion of kings was not the dominion of a tyrant king who used his power to kill and fear and

death to intimidate and overcome. Instead, the dominion as a king in scripture is the dominion of our loving and gentle servant king to strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the injured, bring back the strayed, and seek the lost, like in Ezekiel 34:4. And to protect the defenseless and give justice to the oppressed. Applying this to our dominion over all creation tells us that we must care for it, preserve it, and let it come to life to live in the abundant blessings of fruitful creation.

After all, the second part of the reading from Genesis 2:5-17 reminds us **that we are created from dust. God has made us in his image and breathed life into the first man and woman.** As we talked about in Genesis 1: 26-28, God has made us and given us life along with all the other created things of heaven, earth, and the sea. And God has given us dominion and rule to care and give life. We are the caretakers of God's creation, as he is the caretaker of us all.

At the heart of the creation story, we have a God who cares deeply for us and all he has created. God does not want us to dominate and rule but to love and care; he created us in his image and placed us closer to all he has made. We belong to God, just as all creation belongs.

As St. Francis says, all creation sings God's glory, joined together as a family of God. He calls them brothers and sisters.

Yet, in Romans 8:19, all creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed." all creation groans eagerly for the savior. (8. 22) Savior to restore and heal, to redeem and save. And show us the true meaning of kabash and radah.

Mark 10:41-45 explains that Jesus is the Messiah who came, as Philippians 2 verse 5, as "who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his advantage; instead, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant and being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death even death on a cross. Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the world and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."

Jesus came as a servant and humble King to show us compassion and humility. He came to save the world not with fierce force and threat or intimidation but with humility, gentleness, and love. Though James and John and perhaps others who followed Jesus did not fully understand this, God sent Jesus Christ to save and give life, rule, and have dominion over all God's creation. Exactly what God had this in mind when he said, "Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and every living creature that moves on the ground." In Genesis 1:28

When you take the next tramping trip or spend time in your garden and walks... think of this compassion calling; slow down and breathe in his glorious creation. Feast your eyes on all colors, listen to the sound surrounding you, and touch, smell, and taste by entering into nature and fully immersing in God's beauty and creation. Think about how deeply we are interconnected with God and with all God's creation, and so pray and consider God's creation; have humility like Christ; live and act in hope, as being created in the image of God who loves, cares, protects, provides, and preserves. Perhaps we should also apply this to all our lives, even to all we meet and care for. Caring for creation is God's calling and blessing upon all our lives: to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and care and live in the abundance of the fruitfulness of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.