

Balance

A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC,

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Scripture Reading Genesis 1:1-8, 14-19

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

6 And God said, ‘Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.’ ⁷So

God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. ⁸God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

14 And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.’ And it was so. ¹⁶God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

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In the beginning,

God, the source,
Brought pattern from chaos,
Balance from imbalance,
Dawn from midnight,
And saw that it was good.

In the beginning, God cast the bright sphere of the sun up into the sky, to give light upon the earth.

And God saw that it was good.

God, our awesome God, was perhaps the very first to practice awe at the wonders of God's own creation. It was *good*.

God set a balance in creation. A balance between land and sea, a balance between noon and midnight, a balance between sun and rain, a balance between plants and animals.

And God saw that it *was good*.

And then, at the end, right before God rested, God brought a new creature into the world: human kind, created in God's image. Created to practice awe at the wonders of God's creation. Created to take care of creation on God's behalf. Created to keep the balance.

Genesis 1:31 says something important. After all that God creates, and after human kind is created in God's image, Genesis says: God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good.

God saw everything that God had made and indeed it was very good. All of creation together, in balance, indeed was very good.

We know that this is not a literal telling of history. It's a testimony of a people of faith about the God they worship. It's a work of Liturgical Poetry, says scholar Ellen Davis.¹ Praise God from whom all blessings flow, says Genesis 1. Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee, says Genesis 1.

¹ <https://onbeing.org/programs/wendell-berry-ellen-davis-the-art-of-being-creatures/>

In the last few decades we've begun to understand the story of creation as a story of exquisite balance - and our place within the story to be stewardship. We are the last, and created to care for the rest. Keeping the balance. Walking in awe and gentleness upon the earth. We are created with responsibility.

My Lord, He said unto me

"Do you like my garden so fair?

You may live in this garden if you keep the grasses green

And I'll return in the cool of the day"²

But for a long time, most of modern human history, this story has been about the gifts God has given to human kind. To quote Ellen Davis again, we put priority on land possession and figured care for creation would be taken up by someone else.³

² <https://genius.com/Jean-ritchie-now-is-the-cool-of-the-day-lyrics>

³ <https://onbeing.org/programs/wendell-berry-ellen-davis-the-art-of-being-creatures/>

We ceded our responsibility, or even worse denied that we have any relation to creation beyond burning through it at will.

Returning to the beginning we see that God first gave us this task:

To be stewards of God's good, beloved, beautiful creation, to be in right relation with creation.

In nature that means taking care, being stewards - dominion as it is often translated it is not domination but caretaking.

If we are made in God's image, we are made to follow God's ways. If we are made in God's moral image, then we are made in the image of Love. In the words of Barbara Brown Taylor on this same text, we are "made in the image of the First Lover, the Divine One....if that is true, that we have been put here to live in that image, then

the only dominion we can possibly exercise is the dominion of love....we are here to love as God loves.”⁴

We are here to keep the balance.

We, collectively, are here to keep the balance. But creation is out of balance. Individually and even as a congregation we cannot bring things back into balance.

So why do we do what we do? Why do we drive EVs, install heat pumps, compost, reduce our plastic use, eat local, lower our carbon footprint, teach our children to care for the earth, install these gorgeous solar panels, go to climate rallies, call on our leaders to lead on climate?

Why do we do what we do?

Because we are trying to return to that first responsibility. And because we are people of active hope. We work for

⁴ “The Dominion of Love: Genesis 1:24-31; Matthew 5:43-48” by Barbara Brown Taylor. Sermon preached at Columbia Theological Seminary in 2007. Published in Journal for Preachers.

our actions to align with our values. Our actions are a testimony to the world we want to live in.

You've heard me talk about Active Hope before, as Joanna Macy and Chris Redstone frame it:

There are three basic worldviews relating to our relationship with creation.

The first is Business as Usual. Everything's fine and there's no reason to change the way we live.

The second story is the Great Unraveling. It's the story of the collapse of ecological and social systems.

But Joanna Macy suggests that a third and radically different story should be our story. "The third story is held and embodied by those who know the first story is leading us to catastrophe and who refuse to let the second story have the last word. Involving the emergence of new and creative human responses...a life-sustaining society committed to the healing and recovery of our world. We

call this story the Great Turning. The central plot is finding and offering our gift of active hope.” (Active Hope, p. 5)
To have the future we yearn for, we need to live into that story as we write it.

This day when we are dedicating our solar panels, we are practicing active hope. We are recommitting to being stewards of creation, saying yes again to God. And we are inviting our neighbors, our friends, our family, our leaders to join us.

Folks are looking for hope in the face of the storm, refuge from the fires. We are not giving up. Solar panels are a beacon of that commitment. To quote poet Wendell Berry, *“When hope sets out on its desperate search for reasons, it can find them.”* – Wendell Berry

With active hope, with commitment and determination, we will do our work to rebalance creation. Amen.