
Genesis 1: 26-31

Is There Ever Enough? What Does the Bible Say?

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This month our worship theme is Stewardship. Now sometimes we use the word stewardship when we do our annual fund raising appeal, and so we have come to associate it with fundraising. But actually the Bible has a much more comprehensive view of stewardship. Stewardship is the way you use your gifts. In the Bible, good stewardship means seeing God's gifts in your life, and then using them for purposes that support God's vision for the earth and to make the world a better a place. Stewardship is the way you live your life. It is everything you do with all that you have. We have intentionally set time aside this spring to talk together about the true meaning of stewardship.

The idea of stewardship starts in Genesis 1. Here we learn that there is a plan for all of life. It is an incredible blueprint and we humans have a major role to play in God's plan. Long ago God selected this planet, cradled in the orbit of our sun and moon, and here it was that God chose to create the heavens and the earth as we know it. Over a period of indeterminate time God coaxed forth life on this planet. With wisdom and care, God set in motion the principles of evolution and selection. God set the stage for botany and biology. Over time, against the odds, life emerged in all its multiple forms. The more we know and see about nature the more we appreciate the complexity of life – things like the language of flocks of

birds, the emotions of whales and dolphins, and the navigational skills of the monarch butterfly. God saw everything on this wondrous planet teeming with varieties of life. And God knew that it would need some tending, creatures to be stewards- one species would have to look after the rest. So God set humans above the others to have dominion over it all. What a gracious and sometimes frightening gift!

To read this story here in May in New England is to begin to see the beauty of this original plan. Watching trees come to bud after an interminable winter is to see the story of creation with fresh eyes. After months of cold and snow the signs of spring seem all the more precious for their absence. The Bible says that God has given all of it over to our care and keeping to watch, to cherish and to control. God put us in charge. What does it mean to be good stewards? Let's take a look at the Bible and see what it says.

In the first place, **being stewards is an enormous privilege.**

In the Bible all life revolves around the household. The stories about Israel are set against the backdrop of the standard home. In Middle Eastern households 2000 years ago there was always a steward, someone in charge of the place. It might have been the oldest adult, or the parents of the family, but in the bigger estates the steward was a hired and highly respected position. The steward's job description was to survey the property to evaluate when to plant, how to prepare the soil, where to graze the cattle, who to hire for which jobs. The steward organized the work, gave directions and set goals. Everyone from the landowner down showed the steward deference and respect. His was an honored position in the household, and everyone depended on him and appreciated him.

Even in our homes we know what the role of steward looks like. Most adults think of their role in their families in similar ways, whether or not they are explicit about it. But no one is born knowing how to be a steward. Then as now, it is a role one has to grow into. Most of us grow into stewardship. Life trains us to be good stewards.

There are times in life when we know the privilege of a steward's responsibility. We may feel this privilege at work when we are appointed to head up a special project, or manage an office, or captain a team. We may feel it when we are elected to chair a committee or coach or captain a team. You may feel the sense of stewardship when you watch nature and learn about a species you never really appreciated, or discover some new problem with our climate that needs human intervention. Being the stewards is a privilege we did not earn or apply for. But evidently God needs us for this holy purpose.

Many people feel the awe of stewardship for the first time when we hold our first baby in our arms. As you know, I spent time last month with my newest grandchild, in her first week of life. I was reminded of the honor of being in the presence of one so young. It was like watching the bud of a flower begin to open. But one of the interesting privileges of this part of my life is watching my children become parents. They have a steep learning curve too. Many of you know what that is like. There is something about holding someone so young and vulnerable that jolts you into adulthood in a new way. No one who holds an infant in their arms can fail to feel the great gift.

From all the pictures I have of that week the ones I never tire of are the pictures of Liz and Seth soon after Mira was born. They capture a moment when parents take in the wonder

of creation and hold a little person in their arms that first day. Words fail them. Tears are the only adequate language of praise. The earth stands still and any question about the fullness of life or its meaning is laid to rest. They know for sure what a privilege it is to be stewards of this little slice of creation.

In the second place **it is a big responsibility to be stewards.** Most new parents go through many stages as they grow into their role. The sense of privilege you first have gives way to a sense of big responsibility. You stare into your infant's face or you watch this little person sleep and recognize that you will have to provide them with everything from food to a home to education. You will have to watch your language now because they will hear what you say and copy you. You will have to consider how to create a wholesome environment in your home, and think about the example you set every waking hour.

Or if your parents start to need you and you have to consider how best to care for them, it seems a huge responsibility to be their stewards. Being a good steward demands a lot of you. But I believe at some level we understand that we are stewards of creation. We understand what a huge responsibility it is.

In the last few weeks French economist, Thomas Piketty has captured the world's attention with his book entitled *Capital in the Twenty first Century*. His 700 page tome outlines and analyzes his research about the inequity of wealth and the trend in which 1% of the world's population holds half of the world's wealth. The inequity of wealth is dramatically increasing. Every bit as important as the content of his book is the news that it has sold out in an unprecedented rush. Topping the *New York Times* bestseller list for 3 weeks, it sold out at

Harvard University Press and Amazon. No one saw this coming. But I believe the popularity of this new books may be attributed to his readability and to the fact that we humans understand that we are stewards of the earth and caretakers of world's economic situation. At some level we all understand that as stewards of creation we need to understand how wealth is distributed. We have all begun to feel these trends. We sense that we cannot be good stewards if we don't understand the issues. Stewardship involves responsibility.

Finally **stewardship involves risk.**

When we consider our various responsibilities it can make us feel cautious. But Jesus had understood the role of the steward. He knew that it would make conscientious people cautious when they considered their responsibilities. So he told several stories about stewards, and these stories are meant to challenge us and give us pause. The most famous one is the Parable of the Talents.

You remember it was a story about a house with a large family and a lot of servants. When the landowner left he chose three stewards and gave them his money and resources in varying amounts. One man invested the money entrusted to him and doubled it. Another man followed suit. But the third man was cautious and frightened of risk so he buried his money in the ground. When the master returned he approved of the two who had invested and was furious at the cautious man.

The story always seemed unfair to me, but it was meant to make the point that caution can be over-rated. Caution can only take you so far in life. Jesus says God has given us so many gifts. But our job as good stewards is to take prudent risks from time to time. Jesus cautions us

that we cannot afford to allow our fears to make us too cautious. God expects us to receive the gifts God bestows upon us and then to use them.

The best times in life are often those moments when we have a sense of adventure. Our choir demonstrated that this weekend. The choir took a risk to do Faure's Requiem last night. They took a risk putting on a concert in the spring because they had only ever done a winter concert. They took a financial risk hoping that people would attend two concerts this program year. But the music was stunning and the experience has proved rewarding in ways they never imagined. They have made new friendships with the singers in the Canton Choral Society, and they have discovered another choir that blends with them musically and works with similar commitment and work ethic. Some new doors opened, as they always do when you take risks. New adventures keep us vital and vibrant.

When God created the earth and all that is in it, God made us stewards of creation. God took a chance on us. It is a privilege and a huge responsibility. But God is hoping that we will do our best, which means sometimes we will have to take some risks.