



Sunday, January 29
9:00am & 11:00am

Taking Charge



Creation Care
OUR COMMON CALLING

“Taking Charge”
January 29, 2023 | 4th Sunday after Epiphany
Jo Wiersema | Genesis 1:24-26

The Scripture Reading today comes from the Book of Genesis, Chapter 1, verses 24-26 (CEB):

God said, “Let the earth produce every kind of living thing: livestock, crawling things, and wildlife.” And that’s what happened. ²⁵ God made every kind of wildlife, every kind of livestock, and every kind of creature that crawls on the ground. God saw how good it was. ²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take *charge* of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth.”

God of all creation, you made all of this. You made the creatures that crawl and the birds that fly, and you made us. In your image, we are here to listen and serve you as our God and to be a servant to the world you made. In your son’s name, Amen.

This past fall, I went with a few of our High School Youth to the Stronghold retreat. Throughout the weekend there were an assortment of activities, panels, and opportunities to learn. One of the sessions I had the privilege of sitting in on was a “no question off limits” session.

I as a seminary student, and two pastors got into a circle with an assortment of Middle and High School students from across the Midwest and prepared to if not answer, at least discuss any question they had.

At some point the question comes up: is it ethical to eat meat?

After some silent reflection, there was a slew of responses: “I love burgers!,” “Wouldn’t meat just go bad anyway?,” “How can one person changing their eating help the world?”

After the initial hubbub, as the good seminary student, I pulled out my Bible and flipped to the passage we just heard above. We are to take charge and that might mean we care a little more about the animals we interact with and the meat we choose to eat.

Before some of you tune out, this isn’t a sermon on veganism. This sermon doesn’t answer “is eating meat ethical,” just as the brief time we had with the youth didn’t answer that question. What we can do, is set a precedent to first look at our Bible as a guide before getting too far into the nitty gritty of “right” and “wrong.”

There are two creation accounts in the book of Genesis. This first creation account focuses on the day-by-day story of what all is made each day. Each day has something beautiful and special that God makes. The language we use in Godly Play, or what you might know as Kaleidoscope is this:

“On the sixth day God gave us the gift of all the creatures that walk upon the earth: the creatures that walk with two legs, like you and like me, and all the creatures that walk with many legs.

When God saw the creatures that walk with two legs and the creatures that walk with many legs and like all the other days, God said, “It is very good.” And that was the end of the sixth day.”

Taking Charge doesn’t make us more powerful

What I love about this telling of the sixth day is there is nothing about the power hierarchy of humans and the animals of the earth. The translation of the Bible I read from today, which is the Common English Bible, uses the phrase “Take Charge.” This is compared to some other translations where they might say “Rule over” or “have dominion over.” I struggle with these other interpretations of the Hebrew text, because the English connotations of “ruling” and “dominion” are so much harsher. Ruling over something or someone creates this idea of a ruler and someone who is being ruled. A hierarchy of power is embedded into the language.

The language of having ruling and dominion is one that has been used to support this idea of submission and conquest of the other creatures of the Earth who walk and crawl. There is an outdated, but still present idea that we are to “do what we will” with nature and push onward and upwards to control the Earth. Not that this is something we see from our neighbors or ourselves, but like many antiquated ideologies, it potentially permeates into our everyday.

It's something we must actively unlearn.

Dominion vs Partnership

We are given power by God, this charge we have over the Earth and the green things and creatures who fly, swim, and crawl. It's an important charge that God has gifted to us, as humanity that has been made in the image of God.

The beautiful thing about the creation account in Genesis 1, is that it has this delineation between what happens each day. There's a rhythmic pairing throughout the days: light and dark, water of the sky and of the earth, dry land and plants, creatures that fly and swim.

And finally, we get to the sixth day, and how not only was God on a creative bend making land animal after land animal, but God also made us. There is something humbling about this narrative emphasizing the pairing of humanity and the creatures of the land.

We, as humans, did not get our own day. God, though making us in Their image, made us share this time with all the land creatures of the earth.

We are given charge over the animals, but at the end of the day (pun intended), the narrative says we came into this together.

This idea that we are God's creation, taking charge, moves us away from a dominion and hierarchical view of the animals under our care, and moves us towards a partnership. We work alongside the animals to till the earth, to feed one another, and to cultivate God's creation.

There's a mutual respect when we think of our work with the creatures of the Earth as a partnership. When planting our garden, we can thank the birds, squirrels, and worms that bring life into the soil.

When we eat meat, we can thank the animal that gave its life for us to have food. Even for when we don't eat meat, we can thank the animals and the ground and the conditions of this earth that allowed for that grain or vegetable to be on your plate.

Partnering with animals and earth

When we change our perspective of this relationship of the earth from one of dominion and rule to one of partnership and companionship with the earth, some beautiful things can happen. You can see the world in a new light. The intertwining of God's earth and the things we need to happen will sort of crop up.

How can I partner with my little piece of God's green earth and bring love to it?

I'm not a gardener, and I'm not saying the best next step as you walk out of here today is to immediately go to Home Depot and prepare for the spring. You're welcome to, but that's not everyone's gift.

But there is something for us to take with us out of these sanctuary or Youtube doors: I can thank the Earth for what it has given me.

I can thank the trees that allowed for my sermon notes to be printed.

I can thank the chickens that laid the eggs for me to be nourished this morning.

I can thank the fellow humans who helped inspire the words of this sermon.

I can thank the snow for the magnificent wonder it brings and the childlike joy it brings out in so many of us.

I can thank God for a world They made, for me to keep and work with for a little while. A world that needs more care than dominion and for us to walk alongside creation instead of making it submit to our needs.

One of my favorite translations of the New Testament is the First Nations Version. The First Nations Version recounts Christian Scriptures following the tradition of native storytellers' oral culture. It translates 1 Corinthians 3:9 this way:

“For we are working side by side with the help of the Great Spirit. You are Creator’s garden where he grows good fruit, and you are the sacred lodge where he has chosen to live.”

We are the sacred lodge God, the creator of the universe has chosen to live. We must take this knowledge and responsibility and use it to support the world we were given.

We were made in God’s image to serve not only God, but to serve this world. We can go out today and serve alongside creation, just as we have since the very beginning.