

Season of Creation Week 1 Year A: 9 / 10 September 2017

St. James Episcopal Church, Clinton NY

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Love calls us to reframe our notion of stewardship

Genesis 2:4b–22

Psalm 139:13–16

Acts 17:22–28

John 3:1–16

Philosopher, ecologist, and theologian Norman Wirzba writes in his book, *Living the Sabbath*: “Our temptation has been to step outside of our creaturely roles and try to be little gods ourselves, gods who will take by force the many things we should otherwise gratefully receive as divine gifts.” (p. 28)

“As the second creation story of Genesis 2.4-24 makes abundantly clear (by building upon the first), to be an authentic *adam* is to be intimately tied to the ways of soil (*adamah*), to be attuned to the soil’s limits and possibilities...Far from being an excuse to do with creation as we want, the exercise of dominion is the practical training ground in which we learn to live patiently and attentively with others so that the mutual flourishing of all becomes possible.” (p.32)

Wirzba’s writing helps the reader appreciate Hebraic word-play as demonstrated in *adam* being a play on the word *adamah*, which translates as earth (soil in Wirzba’s reading). Essentially, what the word-play suggests is that humanity was fashioned from the earth, thus rendering Adam to not simply being a proper name but a euphemistic name meaning ‘earth creature’ – that which is created from the earth. Earth-creature is a more honest and correct hermeneutical translation for *adam/adamah*. As such, it ought to contextually reframe our biased understanding of the creation narrative. If it does not, then it needs to.

Over the course of too many centuries, humanity has brazenly misunderstood or misappropriated the creation narrative to subsume plant and animal life as subservient to humanity’s needs and wants. Creation, we tell ourselves, is beneath our status as humans. It is ours for the taking and ours to use as we will regardless of the consequences. For decade upon decade, we have exploited creation for our

own pleasure and greed. Indeed, we have forgotten our “creaturely” nature and inserted ourselves as “little gods” in place of God, the fountain of life from whom “we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17.28a) God is no longer seen or understood as the source of blessings, and the author of all life. God is now simply used – particularly by evangelist who espouse the prosperity gospel ideology – as a means to justify our greedy desires. Where once we were stewards of creation, we now believe ourselves to be its master. Creation will submit under the whip of our demands. It has to, for it is our property and we have the paperwork to prove it.

How prideful we are of the American “dream” to own our own home, to have title to a track of land. Little gods indeed. As if we can have ownership of nature by issuing a piece of paper for a monetary exchange that details our property rights. All of this is folly. Human vanity.

If left unchecked, we will be like too many locust or some parasite consuming our resources to the point of exhaustion, thus render the earth, our island home, uninhabitable. Acting in such a manner under the guise of Christianity is truly more than a sin: it is an abomination of our creaturely role as stewards.

Rather than being a source of exploitation, Christianity can be the source of repentance and reconciliation where we honor our origin as being created (*adam*) from the soil, the earth, (*adamah*) and as such, recognize our symbiotic relatedness with all creation. This source of repentance and reconciliation emerges in our baptism.

In today’s gospel, Jesus says, “very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above...without being born of water and the spirit.” This notion of water and spirit is the central and irreducible component of our Christian faith. We cannot call ourselves Christian without first – through the waters of baptism – dying to our “selves” – the idea of a separate self. Only then can we experience new life and be incorporated into the body of Christ – the *ecclesia*, what in modern English we translate as church, or better translated as assembly (us assembled here today). That is the essence of being “born again.” It is more than a simple proclamation of faith, it is a physical and spiritually ritualized cleansing. In the waters of baptism, we die with Christ and rise redeemed.

The redeeming salvation worked by Jesus upon the cross is not, however, limited to humanity. It witnesses to the fulfillment of creation itself. Wirzba writes, [that] “Jesus, in his life, death and resurrection gives voice to what it means to be human: to lose ourselves in love and to be obedient to what love calls us to do.” (p. 44) And what, you may ask, does love call us to do?

Love calls us to proclaim the Good News of the Kin-dom of God ~

Love calls us to teach, baptize and nurture new believers ~

Love calls us to respond to human need by loving service ~

Love calls us to seek to transform the unjust structures of society ~

Love calls us to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth ~

These are the five marks of mission that are based on our baptismal promises. Together they form the core essence of Christian stewardship where stewardship is not defined in terms of monetary budgets and deficits, but understood in terms of care-giving and nurturing; in the grace of abundance. God’s kin-dom is built upon our relating to creation as God relates to the created. As the author of life, God placed the earth-creature (humanity) in the garden to tend to its needs; God even extended to the earth-creature the responsibility to name the plants and animals of creation, an act of power and authority, as well as commitment and accountability. All is well, that is, until the earth-creature takes what was not blessed by God for its own consumption. Through this act, the earth-creature (humanity) displaces God as the source of blessing and abundance, thus rendering the earth-creature a ‘little-god’ deciding for itself what is good and evil on its own accord. To take what is not blessed by God distorts God’s intention such that humanity no longer relates to creation as God does. As a result, humanity has become deaf and blind to what love calls us to do. Fortunately, through the waters of our baptism we are renewed and restored such that we are forgiven our sin of idolatry, the idolatry of our self rather than the worship of God. When we became ‘little gods’ we broke the first and second commandments and no longer understand nor relate to God in nurturing and life-giving ways.

Adam is fashioned from *adamah*; humanity is formed from the earth forever thereafter establishing a sibling-like relationship between all that is created, human and nonhuman. “...humanity’s most fundamental task,” Wirzba writes, “is to share (however imperfectly) in God’s continuing creative

work of fashioning a livable and lovable world...as bound up in a common membership of creation, we are responsible in certain respects for the continuing becoming of creation.” (p. 32)

When God chose to let humanity name every living creature, humanity became accountable to God for the stewardship of creation. We need to recommit ourselves to safeguarding the integrity of creation, of sustaining and renewing the life of the earth. Love calls us to be co-participants in God’s continuing work of creating. God is not done with creating; God is not done with us.

Love calls us to reframe our notion of stewardship from one based in a model of scarcity where we tell ourselves that there is not enough for me, myself, and I, therefore I must take what I can and horde it; we must change that towards an understanding of abundance where God’s blessing provides for all creation. Stewardship as scarcity or stewardship as abundance. I believe that love calls us to a stewardship of abundance, and as such, I must alter my living in such a way that respects and honors creation rather than approaching creation as something to exploit. As a Christian, love calls me to remember my creaturely nature by which I remember my creaturely role as steward. I am an earth-creature where the Breath of God infuses my life. Hence, I must live my life in such a way that I recognize this abundance of grace where stewardship is understood in terms of care-giving and nurturing. After all, there is enough in the world for everyone’s need (abundance), there is not, however, enough for everyone’s greed (scarcity). Love calls us to a stewardship of abundance. As a Christian, I ask you, what is love calling you to do?

AMEN