

SERMON  
August 23, 2009

**Reading from a Word About Life**  
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Genesis 1

One: Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

**Many: And there was evening and there was morning, the first day**

One: And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." And it was so.

**Many: And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.**

One: And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together in one place, and let the dry land appear. Let the earth put forth vegetation; plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind." And God saw that it was good.

**Many: And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.**

One: And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night." God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night. And God saw that it was good.

**Many: And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.**

One: And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let the birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky."

**Many: And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.**

One: And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.' And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

**Many: Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion...'**

Dominion? Now is a point of decision;

## Dominion or stewardship?

The Word About Life presents a challenge to us of how to be in the world; to care for or to dominate, stewardship or dominion.

Most of human history is a record of conquest and dominion. We, humankind, have struggled against nature to survive as a species. We have strived to overcome other tribes, nations, cultures, and ideologies so that our identity, our values, our culture and our children have the best possible future, even if it is at the expense of others. Most of human history is a record of a horrific and tragic playing out of the old child's game, "King of the Hill".

*"War is the ultimate form of competition and natural selection in the human species. War is one of the constants of history; it has not diminished with civilization or democracy. In recorded history, 3464 years, only 268 have seen no war."* (Paraphrase Will Durant from ***The Lessons From History***)

But a new consciousness and a new ethic are emerging. The new consciousness is about stewardship of the planet and that includes an ethic of "living with" rather than an ethic of "dominance over". It is an ethic of living in right, just, and loving relationship with all things and all people. It is a consciousness and ethic that has been with us all through human history but we have not allowed it to shape and direct human history.

It is a consciousness that has been expressed by words like "green", "all things are related", "celebrate diversity", "pluralism", "Namaste", and pictures of a small but beautiful blue and green marble floating in space. It is a consciousness that has been expressed in all religions and by all founders of the world's religions. Even if the religion is not earth centered like Native American Spirituality there is in every religion a recognition that when we as a species do not honor our relationships with all things and all people there are dire historic and cosmic consequences. As Paul wrote in his letter to the congregation in Rome, "all creation groans in anticipation of humanity doing the right thing".

The new consciousness comes with a new ethic, but it is not really new. What would be new is our wide spread practice of it. Jesus explained the new ethic to his followers one day. He said so you love your family and you may even love your friends. That has value but that's pretty easy to do. Almost everyone does that. Do not expect to get some congratulations and a big pat on the back for that. But what about expanding your circle of love and care? What if you grew in your love and care and it started to expand so as to include your neighbor, the widow, the orphan, then the stranger, the alien, the homeless, the immigrant, the poor, the wounded, the sick, the imprisoned, and the naked (be careful with the naked). What would happen if we even expanded the circle of love until it included our enemy? This is very different from an expanding circle of empire and dominance.

One expanding circle is inclusive and lifts up the good and welfare of the other even if it means some sacrifice on behalf of ourselves. This is justice.

The other expanding circle is exclusive and sacrifices the good and welfare of the other for the sake of ourselves. Historically we have called this god given right of dominion and manifest destiny.

Dominion or Stewardship? It is a way of being in the world that we live out all the way from what we do with our trash to how we may trash others. Ancient wisdom brings us a lesson. In the Hebrew scripture is the story of King Nebuchadnezzar and his dream of a giant statue. The head was made of gold. The chest and arms were made of silver. The legs were made of brass and the feet were made of iron and clay. The dream included a huge boulder not made with human hands. The boulder comes flying and crashes onto the clay feet of the statue and the statue falls and shatters into a million pieces on the ground. The story is about how empires fall at the boulder of unfolding history. Empires fall and dominion fails. The ethic of dominance collapses under its own weight.

The peace we think we gain by dominating nature or other people is a false peace because it is based on a lie and the lie is this; somehow we can suppress, control, and deny the force of freedom which is the force of nature, history, and what it means to be human in order to secure our own peace. If we believe this lie than we probably believe we can control all the forces and variables that brought our species to this time and place and all the forces and variables that carry us into the future. Which comes first, the lie or the arrogance?

There is another way to be in the world and there is a “narrowness” to it. The narrowness is not a quality of exclusivity but a quality of its work and eternal worth. There is a peace that comes with the new consciousness and new ethic which is not really new. It is a hard-earned peace that comes with striving to lie in right relationship. It is a peace that comes with justice. Dominion or Stewardship? Choose stewardship.