

About Becoming Stewards ...Of God's Creation



Let's Talk...

To be a "Steward" is to look after or be accountable for the belongings and assets of another. A manager would be the term used today. To have the responsibility to treat property with care and respect on behalf of the owner.

Therefore, the Christian community has begun to look at its understanding of *Stewardship* in a much broader sense. The world, including us, belongs to God. The assumption is that we do not really possess or own anything. Therefore, we are not owners but stewards of all that comes into our lives—income, assets, property, goods, time, talents, and our very selves. Religious stewardship is our human responsibility to care for the Earth itself.

The Bible gives us clear guidance. (Gen 1:1-2:4) has God giving humans dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the animals of the land. The Hebrew word for "*dominion*" does not mean "to dominate" or "to exploit. Rather, it means "to take responsibility for," as a ruler would be responsible to assure the well-being of those in the realm. In this first creation story, human beings were created last, not as the so-called "crown of creation," but in order to exercise responsibility for the well-being of the garden - Earth. According to Genesis 1, exercising responsibility as part of God's creation is the main reason humans were created. Therefore, being stewards of creation is foundational to what it means to be human. Caring for creation represents our proper human relationship to Earth.

The second creation story goes even further in clarifying the concept of stewardship (Gen 2:5-15). In this story, God put Adam and Eve in the garden in order "to till and to keep" the land. However, the words translated as "till" and "keep" may be misleading. The Hebrew word for "till" is a word used to depict the service that a slave gives to a master. And the Hebrew word for "keep" means to preserve for future generations. Hence, the mandate "to serve and to preserve" the land places human beings not in a hierarchical position over creation but in a position of service to it.

This you will remember is the message of Jesus as a servant-king, so humans are challenged to assume a similar role: "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:35). Care for creation is to be exercised not to serve our own wants and desires but to serve the best interests and well-being of all Earth—this includes ourselves.

According to the Scripture, God wills for creation to thrive in all its diversity. God wills for air, sea, and land to bring health and well-being to all creatures. God's covenant with Noah and all creation affirms that all living creatures are in solidarity with each other in covenant with God (Gen 9:8-17; Hos 2:18). We are admonished throughout Scripture for all creation to worship God: "Let the sea roar and all that fills it; let the field exult and everything in it. Then shall the trees of the forest sing for joy" (1 Chr 16:29-34). All parts of creation together—human and non-human creatures and the rest of the created world—are to "praise the name of the Lord" (Ps 148).

The book of Revelation describes this praise: "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth, and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them singing, "blessing and honor and glory

and might to the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be forever and ever" (5:13). What a vision! We are in solidarity with all creation to celebrate together in praise of our creator. This is also future oriented for we are to maintain and establish a sustainable life on Earth—to leave creation healthier and more resourceful than it was in the previous generation. The Bible says unequivocally that God's purpose is to restore all creation.

The whole notion of incarnation—God becoming flesh (John 1:1)—is that the divine movement is not an escape from Earth but **a movement toward embodiment in creation**. Jesus became flesh to bring "new creation" (Gal 6:15). Paul testifies to this vocation when he claims that "the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains" ready to "be set free from its bondage to decay," as it "waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God" (Rom 8:18-25) who will care for each other and for Earth. We are called now to be those children of God who exercise stewardship in relation to all creation.

As the book of Revelation shares the vision of **the end-time** we understand that **God will come to a renewed heaven and Earth and will dwell here among people** (21:1-27). The New Jerusalem is nature in the midst of the city, the river of life flowing through the middle of the city streets available and free to all. God will dwell here and will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

So in the twenty-first century it becomes essential to embrace stewardship of Earth at a collective and personal level. We need to change the system and we need to change our personal behavior. As communities of faith we will need to be committed to renew our beliefs and actions to bring about a reformation in the church as an institution—transforming our worship and educational programs, making our buildings and grounds Earth-friendly, observing best practices at coffee hour and meals, and teaching our children to be Earth-keepers. On the personal level, we need to become responsible stewards in relation to that which is directly in our care. Consider your living space is connected to virtually every environmental problem we face—the emissions from your furnace, the food in your refrigerator, the coal from the electricity you use, the water that goes in and out of your house, the products you purchase that are shipped from a distance, the treatments you give your lawn, the gas in your automobile. The choices we make about these everyday matters have a direct impact on the well-being of the Earth. *We can* make a difference, every single day. We have it in our hands to make daily choices that can lighten our negative impact on Earth and help to restore God's creation.

There is a concept of **"environmental tithing"** that is relevant today. Most people are familiar with the biblical concept of tithing, the giving of a "tenth." We can also apply the tithe to the stewardship of our personal resources of Earth. Can we reduce our electrical, gas for heating, water, use by ten percent? Can we eat ten percent less food that comes from a distance, or 10% less meals with meat? Can we travel ten percent less than usual? Can we invest a tenth of our financial resources in funds that contribute to sustainability? Can we set other goals to reduce our impact on the environment by a tenth—or more? And if we can, we will begin to understand about being "Stewards" of God's precious world.

Good Steward of this creation how are you managing that which does not belong to you?

Sherry