

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Gifts in the Garden"

Scripture: Genesis 2:4b-25; Psalm 104:24-34

Opening Hymn: Oh worship the King 313 or All my hope on God is founded 462 1,3,4

Closing Hymn: God bless your church with strength 491 or Saviour, like a shepherd lead us 485

Children's Hymn: He's got the whole world in his hands (339 Traditional Version)

Choruses: Cornerstone

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In a notation from 1896,

Anglican missionary R. J. Bowan

Describes how the aboriginal people he was visiting  
made good use of the 'leftovers' from a Caribou hunt:

In his own words:

"The Indians made a frame upon which the hide was stretched,  
the hair removed  
and then the hide was scraped to the required thickness.

After this the tanning material was added  
and it seemed to me the brain of the animal  
formed part of the tanning material.

Then followed incessant working and bending of the hide.

When all was done of the first operation,  
the leather was worked until it was soft...

I witnessed a piece of hard dried sinew  
being bruised with round stones,  
until it could be torn down the whole length of the sinew  
to the texture and thickness of thread.

With this thread and bone needles  
I saw the hides tanned by the Indians,  
cut out and made into moccasins,  
shirts, trousers, coats, and a wonderful garment  
worn by the women as an outer garment,  
in the coldest weather.”<sup>i</sup>

Pretty amazing...

In our modern age of overseas factories  
And courier deliveries from Amazon  
the old ways of indigenous peoples:  
their connection to the land  
and their stewardship of its resources  
is something to imagine.

Among modern indigenous communities,  
There is a concerted attempt to preserve these values.

On the webpage of the Assembly of First Nations,  
(An advocacy organisation  
that represents 634 First Nations communities across Canada)  
the same values are highlighted:

Let me quote:  
“First Nations peoples’ have a special relationship  
with the earth and all living things in it.

This relationship is based on a profound spiritual connection  
to Mother Earth that guided indigenous peoples  
to practice reverence, humility and reciprocity.

It is also based on the subsistence needs and values  
extending back thousands of years.

Hunting, gathering, and fishing to secure food  
includes harvesting food for self, family,  
the elderly, widows, the community,  
and for ceremonial purposes.

Everything is taken and used with the understanding  
that we take only what we need,  
and we must use great care  
and be aware of how we take and how much of it  
so that future generations will not be put in peril.”<sup>ii</sup>

PAUSE

In today’s reading from the book of Genesis  
We hear the Bible’s second account of creation.  
This account is different from the one that precedes it.

As one scholar notes:

“From the majesty and the grandeur of the Rockies,  
we are now invited to explore the Garden.”<sup>iii</sup>

In the beginning we are told that the earth is barren,  
For there is no irrigation (God has yet to send rain)  
And there is no cultivation (God has yet to create man).

But in the midst of this desert God shapes man  
From the dust of the ground  
And by his breath gives this new being life.

Man is put in a garden God creates,  
A place that is called Eden.  
Man is put in this garden to work it and take care of it.

That the first man had a job may be a surprise to some of you.

Most of us envision Eden as a 5-star all-inclusive resort.  
A place to stretch out by the pool  
Sipping a Piña Colada while reading a book.

But God not only creates this man, but gives him a vocation.  
“He is God’s estate manager. [God’s gardener.]  
His task is to [‘work the garden and take care of it’],  
that is: to cultivate and protect.”<sup>iv</sup>

It is interesting how this language sounds so different from what we find  
In the earlier creation story.

In Genesis chapter 1 man and woman are charged to:

“...fill the earth and subdue it.  
Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky  
and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”<sup>v</sup>

The first creation story paints the first couple  
As people let loose to exploit creation,  
While today’s story paints the first man  
as God’s conservation officer.

Of course when we hear God charging his people to rule  
That must be understood in terms of God's rule  
And not in terms of our worst human dictators.

What did Jesus say to his disciples  
When they were arguing over their place in his kingdom?

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them,  
and their high officials exercise authority over them.  
Not so with you.

Instead, whoever wants to become great among you  
must be your servant,  
and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—

just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve,  
and to give his life as a ransom for many."<sup>vi</sup>

In today's story the first man is given the job  
Of managing God's garden:  
He is to work it and take care of it.  
His rule is one of servant leadership.

One of the first tasks he engages in as caretaker  
Is to name all of the animals.

Note that he doesn't number them,  
But he names them.  
Which I think is significant...

While we were in Prince George this summer  
We stopped at the local fair.  
One of the highlights was visiting the stalls  
Where the 4H club members  
proudly displayed their animals

It was interesting to note that whether it was steers or pigs or chickens.  
They all had been given names:  
Names like Sherlock and Moriarty.  
Names like Betsy and Bacon.

Names are significant.  
Names signify a relationship.

Now keep in mind that 4H animals aren't pets.  
They normally go to auction.

But the naming of those animals expresses a positive caring relationship  
That is part of the values of 4H.

In today's creation story we are told that God puts man in his garden.  
And that God gives man a vocation to make that garden flourish.  
This man starts by caring for the creatures around him.  
He begins this by giving them names.

PAUSE

Many years later God has blessed each one of us with a place.  
God has put each of us into a neighborhood.  
Sure we may live part of our lives in other places,  
We may take long extended vacations across the globe.

And yet we all find ourselves calling some place home.

So does our presence in this place  
Promote the flourishing of our neighborhood?

In the same vein God has blessed each one of us  
with a worshipping community.  
God has put each of us in a church.

Sure we may have connections even ministries in other places,  
And yet most every of us would claim one church home.

A home that by God's providence is situated just south of downtown  
In a neighborhood called Sagebrush.

So how does our presence here  
cause the Sagebrush community to flourish?

As an aside, some will argue  
that our calling isn't simply local.  
This is true.

The Great Commission makes the whole world a mission field.

But who else can serve God's purposes in this place better  
Than the ones who by God's providence  
Find themselves here.

PAUSE

In his blog post “If Your Church Closed Its Doors,  
Would the Neighborhood Care?”

Preston Sprinkle recounts visiting a church in Portland:

“I was giving a talk to a bunch of pastors there on a Monday afternoon,  
and the whole building was buzzing like a bee-hive with activity.

My talk was only one of many gatherings that afternoon.  
One room was filled with addicts seeking redemption.  
Another room hosted a group of single moms  
in the neighborhood.

The building probably had more unbelievers than believers in it.

Smells of food lingered in the hallways,  
and the building was filled with a rainbow of ethnicity.

My friend Josh Butler, one of the pastors at [this church], told me:  
“We want to be so vital to the community around  
us that if we ever closed our doors,  
the entire neighborhood would be upset.”<sup>vii</sup>

Let me repeat what he said:

“We want to be so vital to the community around  
us that if we ever closed our doors,  
the entire neighborhood would be upset.”

Now to be honest I find this description a little Christendom-ish.  
It paints a picture of an engaged church  
by describing how many people  
They can push through their doors.



I wonder if we might look at this another way,  
And describe the successful church  
as one with many people going out of it.

Going out to work in the neighborhood and take care of it.  
Getting involved in activities that cause life to flourish.

For churches that are disconnect from their local communities  
This task can seem overwhelming...  
Where do you begin?

I wonder if the first thing to do  
is by getting to know the community.

Simply learning the names of our neighbors:  
The streets, the schools, and the parks.

Getting to know each other's names  
Is the beginning of a positive relationship  
And creates the possibility for care.

In the beginning the first man accepted God's call  
To care for his neighborhood.  
May we have the courage to welcome this call too. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Observations from R. J. Bowen (Anglican missionary visiting the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in in 1896) in "NOTHING WASTED: TRADITIONAL USES OF CARIBOU" [http://trondekheritage.com/images/pdfs/Nothing\\_Wasted.pdf](http://trondekheritage.com/images/pdfs/Nothing_Wasted.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Assembly of First Nations "Honoring Earth" <http://www.afn.ca/honoring-earth/>

<sup>iii</sup> J.A. Motyer *The Message of Genesis 1-11* 55

<sup>iv</sup> J.A. Motyer *The Message of Genesis 1-11* 60

<sup>v</sup> Genesis 1:28 NIV

<sup>vi</sup> Matthew 20:25-28 NIV

<sup>vii</sup> Preston Sprinkle "If Your Church Closed Its Doors, Would the Neighborhood Care?" *Patheos* September 14, 2015  
<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/theologyintheraw/2015/09/if-your-church-closed-its-doors-would-the-neighborhood-care/>