

26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." 27 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." 29 God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Today's sermon is a stewardship message. Stewardship begins at the beginning; the Genesis story. The Scripture today is the word of God during creation. God said "let us create a human." So, human beings are made in the image of God. They have the responsibility to care for the creation, are blessed by God accordingly, and it is all very good. That's the story.

Now let's look at it more closely. In Genesis God said "let us create humans in our own image." That is according to our own likeness. Genesis does not go into a physical description. What is described is action. So that they can rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the wild animals, everything. So, God created human beings, in God's own image, in the image of God, they are created. In Genesis humans are created not to be slaves, not to toil in endless labor, but in the image of God so that we can rule the earth and govern as God governs.

I would like to point out the sentence construction. Again, Genesis is not concerned with describing what this image of God is. Genesis is concerned with what the image of God does. For example, if I say let's go to the restaurant to get something to eat. The structure of the sentence indicates that the purpose of going to the restaurant is to get something to eat. The construction of the sentence indicates its purpose. So, in Genesis humans are created in the image of God for the purpose that God chooses. Which is not to be slaves, but to be in power, to rule the earth. It is God's design, to make humans in the image of God, to be empowered.

Stewardship begins at the very beginning, where we are empowered to govern God's creation on God's behalf. To govern in the likeness of God; to govern like God governs. We are created to have power. We are created to exercise power as God exercises power. We are not to abuse or misuse this power. It is not the power of the emperor. It is not the power of domination. It is not the power of enslaving others. The power is the kind of power that God exercises. It is life giving power that is boldly generous and abundant.

The Genesis story is a very good story. It carries a tremendous responsibility. You are not to run away from it. You are not to manipulate it. You are not to misuse it. You are not to abuse it. You are in a position of responsibility.

As a trustworthy recipient of God's blessing your responsibility requires action - honoring God through faithful stewardship. Not just stewardship but faithful stewardship. Therefore, you have the ethical responsibility to advocate for justice. Stewardship is not just gifts that you can give. The gifts of stewardship are money, time, and talent, They are very important. But they are

not stewardship. Money, time, and talent are agencies of stewardship. That's because stewardship itself is an act of honoring God. You honor God through faithful care of what is created. You honor God by caring for the people, animals, plants, and resources. None of which are to be misused, abused, or destroyed.

God the creator is the source of everything. Therefore, everything that you have, each and every item, God is the source of all of it. We owe our thanks to God for everything. Therefore, we owe a tremendous thanks to God. We must, out of appreciation, act according to divine will. Honoring God requires more than stewardship; it requires faithful stewardship.

Faithful stewardship is devotion to the care of the Master's creation. It requires discipline with the stewardship gifts. Money must be given as specified by God - joyfully and for God's glory. Time must be given as specified by God - in devotion, worship, and service. Talent must be given as specified by God - through a servant ministry, as an advocate for justice, to save this planet, and to help others. We have the ethical responsibility to care for God's creation, as God intended, instructed, and delegated. God's intent is for the good. God's intent is always for the good, it is never to be misused, never abused, never exploited, and never for self gain.

I will wrap up with a real life story of a someone living a life of stewardship. As children Nancy and Joe gave a nickel or dime in the Sunday school collection. Their understanding of stewardship was that everyone should give something. Their understanding evolved to an understanding the stewardship of the Scripture. They made a commitment to live by the Scripture and began to give as they have prospered. You see, to give as prospered is not the same thing as tithing. A tithe is the minimum amount you should give. But the concept of giving as you have prospered is that you give according to how you have been blessed. It is proportional giving. The stewardship goal is to give according to your prosperity; to bless according to how you have been blessed. Joe went to night school, became a lawyer, and in his late 30's he opened his own law firm and began to enjoy financial success. Then he realized that it was time to pay back; to give back to God. So, they adopted slogan "as much for others as for ourselves" which means they gave half. Stewardship is not a law. Stewardship is an act of grace. Stewardship is based on gratitude. It is having thanks and expressing thanksgiving for all of the gracious gifts that God has given. It is giving as God has given. It is giving in proportion to what you have received. It is giving and blessing according to how you have been blessed.

Understanding stewardship means we take ownership of our divine responsibility that we were created for. We are created in the likeness of God to take care of all of the creation. To rule in the likeness of God. To oversee what calls very good.