



Sermons **from Northwood United Church**

“Living with Respect in Creation: What is our story?”

Genesis 1:26-31, Luke 15:11-32

Will Sparks

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May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

I have long believed that the stories we refer to when we talk about our lives create the structure at least, the mythological framework, for the life we choose to live. If we grow up with a steady diet of entrepreneurial stories of people who put creativity cleverness and hard work together to make good for themselves, that will become the framework for our life. If we grow up on meaner streets seeing people get ahead through intimidation and violence, these become the reference points for the world we create for ourselves.

Think about the stories you heard from childhood. Where did they come from? Were they rural farming stories on the prairies, filled with hard work, heartbreak, planting and harvest and the hope of next year? Were they family stories of ancestors, immigrants? Were there heroes? Villains?

I grew up in a family of teachers, so a huge part of the framework of my life has been shaped by stories of how learning and discovery leads to a different life and can change the world. The adage, if we forget the past we will be destined to repeat was a staple in my growing up. My childhood world echoed with heroes like Banting and Best I the discovery of insulin, Billy Bishop, and the early European settlers of Canada, and of course, biblical stories of Moses, and David, and the parables of Jesus create the library that shape how I see the world and where we fit as human beings.

So when I come to this late September Sunday in the season of creation in which we finally ask, where do we humans fit in the fabric of creation, the immediate go to story is the creation story in Genesis 1 in which God creates all things in a very orderly fashion, with words. Let there be light, let there be spaces in the waters, let there be creatures, all of which is good. And then, the piece de la resistance, the humans, the pinnacle of the created order, male and female, at it was very good. And God said, be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. I give you dominion over it all, to rule over the creation.

Well that's pretty explicit. Where do we fit? On top of course. We have been given the keys. We are the CEO of creation. It is here for us. And friends, that has been the story that has shaped certainly the western world's answer to the question of where we fit in the creation for hundreds and hundreds of years. It has shaped our economics, our politics, and our views on what we have the right to do or not do in the creation. We call it resources management now, but the whole legal system around mineral rights, and fishing rights, land tenure all assume that it is given to humans to own and manage the creation. And where does that come from? In the western world, Genesis 1. That's the story which situates humans at the center of the universe God has made. That is why for centuries people thought the sun revolved around the earth, and that is why the church persecuted Galileo for saying otherwise. How dare anyone challenge our story! The story shapes the world, not the other way around.

Interestingly, our society has rejected the biblical narrative and quite successfully replaced it with a scientific one. And although it makes more sense from a scientific perspective, it retains the belief that we have the right and responsibility to manage things here in the created

world. And frankly, the scientific narrative isn't helping us manage the creation any better than the biblical one did. I think it is time we looked at other stories.

Perhaps the story of the prodigal could help re-orient us, show us our appropriate place in creation. After all, this story is all about what we inherit and how we deal with it. The creator has been so generous with us in the creation. We have been given so much. And yet as a species, we seem to be compelled to spend it all while we can. The very concept of burning oil at a rate that will cause it to run out seems prodigal to me, recklessly wasteful, leaving aside what it will do to the atmosphere. Since the industrial revolution, our generations have unwittingly been the prodigal generations, and we are finally waking up to realize that we cannot continue like this. We have taken more than our share of the inheritance of earth and spent it. Have we hit the wall yet? Are we at the point where we can look up and see the reality of our life, like the sun who wakes up in some pig pen far from home and asks, is this who I am now? Is this what I am supposed to be? Perhaps it is time we stopped, and went home, and asked to be the hired hand and not the CEO, trusting in the mercy of the creator. Now there's a story that might re-orient us.

But better still, I believe, is the story of the Good Samaritan. The topic is loving our neighbor, and the question is, who is my neighbor. To which Jesus offers that a man was going down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and he fell among robbers, was beaten, robbed and left in the ditch to die. At first a priest came by, and, not wanting to get involved, passed him by. Then a Levite, a religious leader came by and, also not wanting to get involved, passed by. Finally a Samaritan, someone typically outside the circle of neighborliness, stopped, and helped, and made the necessary sacrifices to make sure the suffering one was cared for.

Now at first glance you might say, Will what does this have to do with our place in the creation? How can this help orient us? But you need to know that the question, who is my neighbor, is a frame setting question. Jesus was speaking to a community that had cast out the Samaritans from the circle of care. We worry about our family, we worry about our immediate community, but we don't worry about anyone else. And the whole point of Jesus telling this story is to get them to expand their world, expand the circle of care. It never occurred to them that they ought to include the Samaritan in their circle, and this story pushed back the boundaries.

And friends I believe that needs to happen again. We know in our hearts, it is bred in our bone you might say, that we are our brothers and sisters keeper. When someone else in the human family suffers, we feel responsible to help, to be a good neighbor. And when we suffer, we hope to be the recipient of human kindness. But that is where we draw the line- at humans. They are our neighbors.

We need to re-draw the line. The non-human parts of creation are not simply resources for us to use and manage- they are our neighbors. The whales and the dolphins, the cedar groves and the rivers, the park down the street, these are not just there for us to use, but rather are part of a community. Loving the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind, and loving your neighbor as yourself must become for us about loving these things, these our neighbors, all of the human and the non-human in God's creation, seeing every part as a part of a community every bit as integral to our life and our survival as the Jewish community was in Jesus' day.

Who is my neighbor, they asked, and Jesus blew the question wide open with a new story. Who are our neighbors, we ask, and the question creates a whole new story of love for the whole creation.