

Taking Care

Genesis 1:26-31 & John 6:1-14

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First Presbyterian, Luling

One change I've noticed since the pandemic began is the way people end conversations, whether on the phone, on zoom, or even by email. "Stay safe," they say. Or "Take care." Even "Be well." Maybe I wasn't paying attention before, but I really do think this is a change. We're more concerned with the physical and mental well-being of the people we interact with. That's a good thing. I think we've become more aware how our neighbors' well being has been entrusted, at least in part, to our care. Remember the encouragement we heard to wear masks: your mask protects me; my mask protects you?

When we sign off a zoom call or end our phone conversation with "take care," then we're expressing a deeper truth, even if we don't realize it. We are entrusted with taking care of each other, taking care of our neighbor.

Even deeper than the truth that we're to take care of our neighbor, is that we're entrusted with the care of all creation, the stewarding of it, the protection and management of everything. That sounds like a big job, because it is. It's a responsibility given to us at creation, in the passage that Etta read a few minutes ago. We're supposed to oversee the use of animals and plants, to take care of them for their own sake, as well as for the sake of humanity and the rest of creation. How we use animals and plants reflects, or should reflect, God's care for us.

Stewardship is rooted in the creation story. We often use the word stewardship to apply to a small fraction of what it means. We use it for a kind of shorthand for using our money and talents and gifts to support Christ's church. And it does mean that, but that's not all it means. Rooted in creation, we steward the whole world. We recognize God's ownership of all of creation, of all that we can see and of all that we can't see. The world belongs to God. And we are entrusted with caring for it, for its stewardship.

So that stewardship takes various forms. Recycling, turning up our air conditioner settings so it doesn't run quite so much, taking a neighbor to their doctor's appointment, using our musical gifts to lead the children's choir at church, using our teaching gifts to care for children at school, making contributions of various kinds to our church. All of that, and more, is stewardship. Everyone, as part of God's creation, has been entrusted with the care and faithful

use of God's gifts. And God's gifts encompass everything. How we care for and use and direct anything that we have—our time, our talents, our gifts, our property, our money, our stuff—that's all a concrete way of how we live out our faith.

That's the Genesis passage. Stewardship is grounded and rooted in God's creation and order.

The John passage, I chose as an example of what stewardship, using our gifts, managing our resources, can look like when done faithfully. If you press me to choose a favorite Gospel story, I usually end up with the feeding of the 5000, though Jesus calming the storm is also good, and it's really hard to choose. But the feeding of the 5000, or the "multiplication" as it's called in some languages, is right up there at the top of my list. And John's version is the only version that includes the boy who contributes the five loaves and two fishes.

And it's the boy I want us to think about. John doesn't really tell his story—John is focused on Jesus's actions, and what the event reveals about Jesus. Disciple Philip has said, "there's not enough food. We can't feed these people." He's focused on what they lack, rather than what they have. Andrew says, "well, wait a minute. Here's this boy. He has five loaves and two fish," and we momentarily think that Andrew is doing a great job of focusing positively on what resources they do have, ready to think creatively about what can happen with a small amount of resources and a generous spirit. But then he adds, "but what is that in the face of so many hungry people." Andrew retreats quickly, back to the scarcity rather than what they have.

John doesn't explain the boy's motivation, nor really attribute any action to him at all. Our imaginations have filled it in. I imagine the boy generously offering what he has, as children are quicker to do than adults, naïvely thinking that it would be enough. He's taking care of his neighbors by giving what he has, even though it's almost laughably insufficient.

Andrew doesn't laugh at him. Jesus doesn't laugh at him. Jesus takes what the boy gives and feeds the multitude of people, with baskets and baskets of food left over. The boy takes care of his neighbors and takes care of his resources, and out of his generosity, Jesus makes abundance.

I hope you're making connections with us, First Presbyterian Church of Luling. Some people might look at us, sometimes we might even look at ourselves, and think that we don't have many resources, that what we do have is laughably insufficient, that we are naïve to think that we might make a tiny dent in the needs of our neighbors or our world. Some of you may be looking at

yourself that way, that you don't have many financial resources, or time or energy resources, or creative resources, that whatever you might offer is laughably insufficient, that you're naïve to think that your contribution makes a tiny dent in the need that the church, or the world, has.

Jesus isn't laughing. Jesus doesn't think your resources, our resources, are insufficient. Jesus doesn't think we're naïve. When we give generously, motivated by taking care and stewarding what we have been given, motivated by taking care of our neighbor, Jesus will create abundance. We all have resources. They vary in kind and amount, but we all have resources. We have bread and fish. We have money and time and wisdom. God created us and gave us the responsibility of taking care of those resources, and taking care of our neighbors and creation by using those resources. When we share them in the spirit of the boy with the loaves and fishes, Jesus will multiply them, with leftovers to spare.

Next time someone departs an interaction with a "take care," I hope we'll think about taking care not only of ourselves, but think about taking care of the wide variety of resources we have, think about taking care of our neighbors with generosity and tenderness.