

John Sampson

“Dominion”

Text: Genesis 1:26 - 31

Preached at KVCC

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Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

Amen.

In one of Nietzsche's books he says that everything he is about to say, he has already said in his earlier work. But this time, he tells the reader, he will say it differently, oh so differently.

And this is how I feel about the reflection I am about to share with you today. I feel like I already offered it to you last Sunday, standing with a handful of wildflower seeds, standing in front of our new butterfly garden over by Market Street, standing there about to scatter the seeds I held onto the ground.

Today, I will say again what I said last Sunday, but today I stand before you not holding seeds in my hands, but a word in my mind and on my lips: dominion.

Dominion is the word that our tradition uses to tell us about how God imagines humanity's role in the Creation. And whether you believe in the creation stories literally or not, dominion is the word that we, as a species, have certainly come to claim for ourselves regarding our role in the earth's global ecosystem.

Dominion – it means power over others. It means sovereignty, and a right to control and dictate the terms of being. It means the freedom of will of those in power, and the submission of will for the ruled. This is the word that our spiritual ancestors put into the mouth of God when she told us what our relationship with her very good creation would be.

Unfortunately, giving humanity dominion over the other living beings of our world has meant disaster for them. We all know that our planet is dying, at least the planet that humanity has always known, the planet that has nourished us, and protected us, and inspired us through its beauty and its loving embrace. This is the world that is slipping through our fingers each day. And it is because we have understood dominion only as a means to satiate our selfish and bottomless needs. Instead of seeing our world as a sacred gift, as something to celebrate and nourish, we've seen it as a resource, which we can consume for our pleasure; it's air, water, plants and animals are nothing more than the raw materials we use to feed our desires individually, nationally, and globally.

But I said it last Sunday, and I will say it again. If our understanding of dominion means there can be no more butterflies, or no more bees in our world, then there is something fundamentally wrong with how we understand what dominion is and should be. Because God didn't create the butterflies and the bees and call them very good for humanity to then come in and extinguish their sacred existence.

It is in a place and time like this, where the very existence of the earth is in question, that we, the spiritually curious, the ones who call ourselves children of God, the people who burn with Spirit, are invited to go deeper, and pray more profoundly, and imagine more radically, so that we can support the healing of our world.

Our teacher Jesus taught us such a simple, but profoundly powerful lesson. He taught us that you don't run from the darkness. You move towards it, but you bring the light with you.

It's in the spirit of our teacher that I invite us not to turn away from this word dominion, a word that seems to have divinely sanctioned our rape of creation, but to look more deeply into it – and to bring the light of understanding with us.

Our English word dominion comes from the Latin *dominus* meaning lord or master. So far, not so good. But go one step further back and we find that *dominus* came from the word *domus*, meaning house. This, I think, gives us our spiritual opening to reimagine the story of creation, and what God is actually offering humanity, what she is actually tasking you and me with.

*Dominus* is the power that comes from leading a *domus*, a household. It is the power that the father had over all the members of his home in ancient times. In ancient Israel the father owned his wife and his children and his slaves. He owned the physical house, and the furnishings, and the farm animals. His power was complete; his dominion was absolute.

But there is something missing in this picture. It is love. Love is missing from this definition of the *domus* and the *dominus*. There may have been loveless households in ancient Israel, but our sacred scriptures are filled with families bonded through love.

Moses loved his wife.

Jacob loved his sons.

Jonathan told David that he loved him more than any woman, and Naomi loved Ruth and promised to follow her wherever she would go.

Mary wept as she watched Jesus die because she loved him.

Love is the missing piece in our understanding of what God was asking of humanity when she used the word dominion to describe our role in the world. She told us that she had

created our world to be our home, to be our household. She told us that we would be the heads of this newly created home, and that all of the plants and animals would live together with us in this home called earth. And she told us that we wouldn't simply be the rigid and cold rulers of this new home, but that we should love all of life just like a father loves his wife, and his children, that we should protect life and nourish it and make it smile and laugh. This is what God has asked of us. This is what God is still asking of us.

This is why we plant seeds in our new butterfly garden.

This is why we protect Tahawus and these great Adirondacks.

This is why our commitment to nurturing all life around the world can never end.

Because this is why God created us, and this is what it means to be human.

Amen.