

“Living in Peace: Stewardship in a Time of Chaos” by Peter Bankson

First Sunday of Trinity



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INTRODUCTION

Our theme for this Trinity season is “Live in Peace.” The reflection question is “How did you offer peace this week?” Good question! To which I might add... and what can you do to find meaning and purpose in these turbulent times?

These certainly are chaotic times: turbulent weather; widespread famine and food insecurity; violent conflict in Ukraine and the Middle East and persistent tension in the Western Pacific; political and cultural confrontation across the nation; and widespread illness and injury in our community. At many levels of reality, we seem to be living in the midst of painful chaos. Where’s the hope? Where can we

turn for the guidance and support we need to “live in peace?”

As I considered our lectionary readings for this week and where we seem to be as a family of faith, three things called out for more reflection. I want to share them here this morning.

- First, we seem to be living through a “re-creation,” a time of deep restructuring. Is God really doing a new thing? What helps us live into our call to work for peace and justice in these chaotic times? (Genesis 1)

- Second, scripture says that, being “made in the image of God” we have dominion over this reality. What does “dominion” mean for us in the face of turbulence at so many levels? How are we doing? (Genesis 1:26)

- Finally, Jesus calls us to “make disciples” of all nations.” What does THAT mean in this time of social and political unrest? (Matt 28:19) What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus committed to working for peace and justice with more and more people crowding the same planet? And, how are we doing?

Let me begin with the Creation story.

LIVING IN PEACE IN THESE CHAOTIC TIMES

If God really is doing a new thing, what helps us “live in peace” in these chaotic times?

Our reading from Genesis begins the story of our experience as a conscious species, living in a bucolic garden, evolving over

time. We have a common understanding that our story is the only one.

But the story of humankind is rich and diverse, with many examples of deep re-creation. The subsidence of Egyptian and Babylonian cultures is part of our story. The cultural dominance of China and Greece and Rome have added their influence on our history. We are just uncovering the story of a Mayan culture on this continent that seems far more complex and diverse than many thought. And the many origin stories that have grown up in different tribes and nations have different and conflicting ways of dealing with other cultures.

I think that one of the key roots of racism we're working to confront in the current Blessed Community class in our School for Christian Growth is that notion that "my story is the only legitimate story." In the class we're looking for a path beyond that painful one we have been traveling in an effort to find a path to living in peace.

Going back to the idea that we may be facing some deeper "new beginning," I know that there is a real difference between the beginning of an era, or the rise of a civilization and the **creation of heaven and earth**, but I suspect there are some similarities. One of them is that the shape of the new creation is influenced by the experiences of what preceded it, experiences that changed the understanding and attitudes of those who lived through the earlier incarnation.

It does feel like we're living through a "re-creation," a time of deep restructuring. If God is really doing a new thing, how can we learn to live more deeply into our call to work for peace and justice in these chaotic times? What does it mean to be conscious human beings and exercise the "dominion" over God's Creation that is described in the beginning of our holy scripture?

EXERCISING OUR AGENCY (DOMINION)

That leads me to my second point – about “dominion.” In this week’s reading from Genesis, we hear that humankind has been created in the likeness of the Creator, endowed with the knowledge of good and evil, and called to “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.” (Genesis 1:26)

What does it mean that God has given us “dominion” over all of living Creation?

For many of us, “dominion” is simply “power over,” that is, the power to use as much of it as we want to satisfy our wishes and dreams and desires. We’ve been on that path for the last 300,000 years or so, learning steadily how to make our lives more comfortable as we grew in numbers. Until today. Today there are over 8 billion of us here, living on the same ground, drinking the same water and breathing the same air as the roughly 200 million who were alive when Jesus was living with his disciples. (That’s 4,000 people living today for every individual in Jesus’ time!)

According to the [World Population Clock](#):

It had taken all of human history until around 1800 for world population to reach one billion, the second billion was achieved in only 130 years (by 1930), the third billion in 30 years (by 1960), the fourth billion in 15 years (by 1974), and the fifth billion in only 13 years (by 1987). During the 20th century alone, the population in the world grew from 1.65 billion to 6 billion. In 1970, there were roughly half as many people in the world as there are now.

I offer these statistics because they point to the challenge of understanding “dominion” in terms of nurturing more than domination. If we understand dominion as some form of “satisfying” or “taking advantage of” the rest of creation for our benefit, we will soon run out of what the earth provides to sustain all life.

No, dominion needs to be about stewardship rather than domination, about caring for the whole rather than “me first!” This kind of stewardship that is at the core of the Way Jesus taught to his disciples.

Finding and developing that kind of compassionate stewardship is a lifelong process of learning from others. I think that’s the kind of discipleship that this week’s Gospel reading calls us to learn and share.

WATCHING AND LISTENING TO LEARN (DISCIPLESHIP)

It seems to me that in order to make others into disciples of Jesus we need to become disciples ourselves. And that takes being on the “Way” with Jesus.

Our Gospel reading calls us to “go and make disciples of all nations.” I grew up thinking that meant convincing others to accept Jesus as their savior and get baptized. But there are other ways of understanding what “disciple” means.

Wikipedia says that discipleship takes watching and listening:

A disciple in the ancient biblical world actively imitated both the life and teaching of the master. It was a deliberate apprenticeship which made the fully formed disciple a living copy of the master. (Wikipedia)

Living in peace requires harmony in diversity. In the creation God called into being, each part has a role to play, and when the different parts learn to play their roles together, the system can resonate in wonder-full ways as different parts listen to each other and come together to support the greater good. We often see that harmony in unexpected ways.

Imagine the sense of harmony that filled the hillside as the crowd that had gathered there to watch and listen to Jesus found that there WAS enough bread and fish to feed all of them! As they listened to Jesus, sharing the bread and fish

added a deep lesson to their discipleship.

Some of us remember the story of how Mary and Gordon Cosby were kept awake by an energetic crowd in the beer hall downstairs from the room where they were staying after a speaking engagement in New England. That sense of lively community moved them to dream of a community gathering place supported by the church with that kind of energy, a dream that helped fertilize the birth of the Potter's House!

Remember when we discerned God's call to find a place of our own, a place where we could continue to grow in our faith while welcoming a "ministry of place" where we could find ways to support new missions and ministries. Last year – even during the pandemic our commitment to stewardship of place kept us busy, teaching us how to connect in new ways.

Remember how we came together as a community to help David Dongo, a visitor who had been drawn to join us for worship shortly after arriving as a refugee from Uganda, and how we helped bring his family here to join him in this country. Today, as we honor Cynthia's graduation from University of Maryland, we can consider what we are learning from having welcomed the Dongo family into our midst all those years ago.

Here's a more recent example. Last Thursday I spent a couple hours here with Denise while she worked with a skilled technician from Verizon to restore our telephone network on the new fiber optic technology. Although I know a bit about electrical engineering, it was inspiring to be present as Denise and the Verizon guy harmonized their experience and got us on the road to a new phone system. When I came to the building to lend a hand I wasn't thinking much about "discipleship," but by the time we finished and the system was connecting as a new creation, I felt that sense of discipleship suggested by our Gospel for this week.

Currently in Seekers Church we sustain our life together and

support active ministry in the wider community through eight mission Groups and nine ministry Teams. Each of these has a particular call to support living in peace. Each of them offers opportunities for the kind of discipleship I'm talking about.

For us, the path to discipleship may not look like Paul, being struck blind on the road to Damascus, or Bill Mefford, guiding the exciting re-creation of the Festival Center, but it does involve watching and listening to others who are carrying pails of living water, learning from what we hear and do.

It means listening to the whisper of the Spirit, watching the examples of others, then stepping out in ways we can manage, carrying what others need and offering Good News where we are. Stewardship of all Creation has a place for each of us. As part of the Body of Christ we are called to stewardship of all creation, beginning with what is within our reach as a creative, inclusive family of faith, working for peace and justice.

It looks like the Vigil on Friday afternoon; the spirited conversations in the Beloved Community class, the longtime support for N Street Village, welcoming all who come and supporting those who stay, support for one another as we find our way through tough times. What does it take to fill your life with meaning, satisfaction, and the love to give again another day?

In some places there are so many people that we need to make room by standing aside.

CONCLUSION

Reality has been diverse from the beginning: SO many different things created from the same few basic elements. Diversity must be really important to God!

We seem to be living through an important "re-creation," a

time of deep restructuring. If God really is doing a new thing, we can help by living into our call to work for peace and justice.

Scripture says that being “made in the image of God” we have dominion over this reality. In Seekers Church, our commitment to “care for all of Creation, beginning with the natural environment” reflects an understanding that for us, dominion is compassionate stewardship.

Jesus calls us to “make disciples of all nations.” As I see it, that starts with being disciples ourselves. In this time of social and political unrest, we pray for the strength and discipline to nurture our relationship with the Creator; to care for every part of God’s creation; to foster justice and be in solidarity with those in need; to work to end all war, and violence, and discord; and to respond joyfully when God calls, freely giving our selves as Christ has shown the way. That’s what it means to be a disciple of Jesus committed to working for peace and justice with more and more people crowding the same planet.

We’ve got some work to do. Thank God we’re in this together!

I’ll close with a poem of mine. It came to me almost four decades ago, when there were only 5 billion people rather than the 8 billion plus we live with now. It still seems like a challenging call to be disciples of Christ as we learn to live in peace.

Peace with Justice

The world is closing in around us.

More people than there’s room for,

wanting more of everything

until the very globe groans

from the wrappers of their
getting.

Desert places, where the emptiness

reminds us of how small we are,

retreat before the concrete truck.

We look at one another with suspicion.

I wonder if your greed

for what I'm sure you do not need

will stop my getting

what I know I

have an inborn right to.

And then there's THEM.

THEY want the world.

Oh, not my part, I tell myself,

they'll let me be.

I'd rather not consider

what they'll make me pay

for their humiliation.

Free enterprise

has taught us something

terribly important:

There is not enough to go
around,

