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Sacred Earth: One gift, One call, One voice...
Loving Sacred Earth
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This image of the earth as one bowl with one spoon captivated me. We only have one earth, just like we only have one of each individual person. Our sacred earth is not replaceable, just as no person is ever replaceable. We know painfully well what happens when we don't take care of the earth, and of people.

And so, we come together week after week to find hope and resurrection in Jesus, for our world, seeking better ways of caring for all creation. We turn to God's Word, asking the Holy Spirit to change our hearts and our behaviors to better reflect the character of God in and for our world. We are made in the image of God, reflecting the very nature of God. We have the capacity and calling to care for all of creation in the way the Creator would care for it, which is through a loving relationship.

I think of my grandfather who sought to care for creation and protect our land as a Kentucky Wildlife and Conservation Officer. My mom told me of her last memory with her dad. He took her and her older brother out the evening of August 6, 1947, to check his fishing lines. My mom was 8 and her brother, 9. Her dad loved being outdoors and shared that love with his kids. It started to storm once they were on the river, so they came back home drenched from the rains. My mom remembers she and her brother lying beside their dad, one on each arm, filling the room with joyous laughter. That was her last memory with her dad.

The next morning, he took his bird dog, Queen, and left before sunrise to enter into the woods of Butler Co., Kentucky, to protect the land. He was not mutually protected. We do not know to this day as to who or why someone took his life on August 7, 1947. On that hot august day, the grandfather I never knew was taken from me...a precious and powerful part of creation.

Just as I find ways to reclaim what was stolen from my family, we as a church are called to responsibly reclaim and lovingly restore what has been stolen

from our world. To do what we can to recover much of what is lost by time and neglect. I believe we can do this by extending the loving relationship we receive from our Creator God to one another and to all of creation.

Here is the reality, God extends to each one of us God's perfect love. It is how God loves... perfectly. That perfect love has clear boundaries so that harm is less likely to occur. My grandfather sought to uphold clear boundaries as a Kentucky Wildlife and Conservation officer. Loving boundaries are reflected in the scripture we read today. We see that God calls us to be responsible for the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the land we live on. We are called to embody the very presence of God with loving relationships. While caring for creation is certainly a part of some political agendas, make no mistake, caring for creation is the very first agenda of our scripture in Genesis 1.

Let's look at Genesis 1:26-31 together...

God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, And, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth."

God created human beings; He created them godlike, reflecting God's nature, and created them male and female.

God blessed them: "Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take care of it all! Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air, for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth."

Then God said, "I've given you every sort of seed-bearing plant on Earth, and every kind of fruit-bearing tree, given them to you for food.

To all animals and all birds, everything that moves and breathes, I give whatever grows out of the ground for food." And there it was.

God looked over everything God had made; it was so good, so very good!

This is the Word of God for the people of God.
Thanks be to God.

I want to focus on two central themes of this passage: our Capacity to care for creation, and our Calling to care for creation.

Because we are made in the image of God, reflecting the very nature of God, then we have both the capacity and the calling to care for all of creation in the way of our Creator. Our capacity and our calling exists because of the loving relationship God extends to us. I think of my grandfather who extended a loving relationship with the land and sought to protect it and share it with those he loved.

Our capacity comes from being made in God's image, as well as from what we have received from those who came before us. Our ancestors are those native to our land. They loved and respected creation in ways with which we are not fully acquainted.

In the book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, the Native American author writes, "The earth is a gift that we must pass on, just as it came to us... we are called to be responsible for all we have been given, for all that we have taken. Our capacity to care for creation has within it a calling.

The earth is as one bowl and one spoon. We take care of our sacred earth, one another and ourselves so that we can continue to breath. God breathed life into each part of creation, gifting us with relationship with one another and the Sacred Earth. Being created in God's image gives us the capacity and capability to imitate God's care for creation as a church by being in loving relationship with the earth. When you are in a loving relationship, you want to find ways to best care for that relationship. So, we are here seeking to grow in a greater awareness of our Sacred Earth and our relationship to it. Because if we don't, we are allowing the relationship with our land to be stolen from us and future generations. Just like someone took my grandfather's life, our family and their community were robbed of that relationship with him.

So, I want us to consider how we can all grow in awareness and practice more loving ways of caring for all creation. Here at Prince of Peace I can think of many examples of how we extend loving relationship in our church community: we use our minds to think deeper and ask questions, to study and learn and create

solutions to problems, and visions for future generations. The ELCA established a statement for caring for creation and we as a church have affirmed this statement which calls us to reflect God's nature and care for Sacred Earth. This involves honoring creation and striving for fairness within our communities, which is communicated to us directly from God's Word. You can find copies of this document on our website under worship downloads.

We use our hands to play musical instruments, paint or draw or take beautiful pictures, build and fix things, pack meals for Feed My Starving Children, plant and harvest our community garden, pick up trash, recycle used materials like bringing our old coffee mugs to share and reuse for Sunday morning coffee...Did you know we have been using ceramic mugs for a year which has kept 18,200 Styrofoam cups out of landfills?

We organize and share donations of food, clothing and furniture; assist in dental care, sew prayer blankets or diapers, cook food for our nourishment; care for one another with hugs, smiles, or opening a door or helping someone rise to their feet or push a wheelchair. We use the gift of our voices to sing, teach, pray, encourage and bless one another, to communicate truth with loving hearts.

While this is all good news, we can grow in our capacity and calling! Let's recommit ourselves individually and as a church family to grow in our relationship with God, reflecting God's nature in caring for creation.

Genesis 1 reminds us we are created in God's image! And because of how we were created, our relationship with God informs and leads us in giving lovingly to all creation. Even when I feel overwhelmed with all the needs of the world, I am reminded instead of getting stuck in shame, blame, and anger because of all the harm that's been done to the world, to consider how to be more loving in relationships, and be the best version of ourselves in and for our Sacred Earth.

As we look to scripture and our role in caring for all God has created, we as a church can join our one voice with each other's voice to make a difference.

Let me suggest a few ways you can reflect the image of God in caring for Sacred Earth:

1.) Consider learning or reading one new thing we can do to replenish creation for what she has so continuously has given to us. Maybe host a small group to read together the book I've referenced today, Braiding Sweetgrass; seek other classes, documentaries, books, podcasts, study groups that help increase our awareness about how our world needs care and ways we can join.

2.) Commit to adding one new practice or lifestyle change to reflect God's nature and care for this sacred space. For example, plant a tree, a garden, flowers to attract pollinators. And when you break open the ground to put something alive into the earth, pause and give thanks to our Creator for the soil that gently holds this new life. God's character... God's very nature is in loving relationship with all of creation.

This clarifies our capacity and calling to lovingly nurture our relationships with all around and within us...nurturing our relationship with the land, with others, with ourselves and our Creator God. We refill the bowl by giving back. We disperse seeds to new places to grow gifts, multiply them by our care for them, so they don't dwindle from our neglect. This is what loving relationship looks like. It's a pact of mutual responsibility to sustain the earth who sustains us.

And so, the empty bowl is filled by our response to the calling for us to join as one voice, to be in loving relationship with our one and only Sacred Earth.