

If you'd let me, I've got this ~God

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church
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Last week I said that the gift of science in the 1500s was blessing, but in the long arc of history, it also been a curse. By that I mean that the Scientific Revolution ushered in brilliant humans who gave us remarkable tools for understanding our world. The dark side of it all, though, was a sense of entitlement that propelled science, and still prevails at times; an ethic that sees creatures and creation as subservient to our human needs.

Church reinforced that viewpoint, teaching an extremely literal translation of the infamous Hebrew Scripture passage where God directs Adam and Eve to *subdue*, dominate, Creation.¹ Modern theologians have looked deeper at the Hebrew, and it is often suggested that the Bible storyteller could very well have meant that humankind called to be “stewards”, caretakers of Creation.

Science has brought us astounding new discoveries, knowledge, but not always tempered with wisdom; perhaps a dangerous thing – knowledge without wisdom. The Oxford Dictionary defines *Knowledge* as:

...facts, information, and skills ... the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject.

Wisdom, we will find, brings generations of experience and an appreciation of a larger context into conversation with the science. Wisdom is defined as:

the body of knowledge and experience that develops within a specified society or period.

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Cultures of every time have the gift of wisdom stories and myths; including major religions and their holy books filled with sacred and aspirational stories as well as cautionary tales of how we humans can get it wrong. People of every time who aspire to be like gods.

¹ See Genesis 1, verse 28. You can find it at:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=genesis+1%3A+28&version=NRSV>

² Oxford Dictionary: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/wisdom>

I recall as a child enjoying great adventures, thrilling journeys often up to high places where I felt like I was king of the world. A few times I learned my lesson, as I slipped and fell from my perch in the tree. I spent one lazy afternoon on the roof of my home, basking in the wonderful view, that is until my father came out, his scolding voice telling me that I was not, in fact, like king or god.

We humans are certainly unique, wonderfully made as the Scripture celebrates. But don't we also have a predisposition to manipulate, to manage, even control, our surroundings with our know-how. Prophets don't have to be biblical as they warn us when we presume to control and manipulate Creation. George Orwell's book, *1984*, published in 1949, showed us disturbing visions of technology and knowledge misused by those in power. One of the most chilling movies in my DVD collection was originally a collaborative book by Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick, that Kubrick then made into an iconic movie, *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

This is all to say that our rich biblical tradition is full of warnings against our human presumptions of power over. The prophets speak to us; ancient and modern ones, warning us.

Creation itself gives us feedback. I laughed as I saw that image on screen now. A night vision camera shot in Elliot Lake. It's a picture familiar to all living on Creation's front doorstep. It is a picture that speaks to me of how nature is talking; Whether we humans are listening or not, who knows.

One commentator reflects on a rhetorical quip God makes in verse 9 of Job chapter 38, a verse not included in our reading today. The scholar says:

You recall the famous passage Genesis where humans are apparently given the right to 'dominate/rule' nature. [In verse 9] God, tongue in cheek, challenges Job to try and do just that. God challenges Job to 'rule' over the wild ox and make it 'serve him' like a handmaid... The implication is that no wild ox will be a docile servant.³

Giving thanks for Creation today is an opportunity for us to feel a sense of awe at the trees and flowers and wide assortment of critters and creatures we see in our backyards.

Wisdom whispers in our ears, and I paraphrase:

You humans are interdependent with Creation, not at all able to control this fragile ecosystem. God, Nature, we have got this, if only you people would stop manipulating.

I'll close by rephrasing that passage from the Genesis chapter 1, where God seems to be saying, "...go have dominion over [Creation]..." I think Eugene Peterson captured the spirit of our special role as humans, called to treat Creation as sacred, as God sees it.

The Message translation imagines God saying it quite a bit differently:

Let us make human beings in our image,
make them reflect our nature so they can
be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air,
the cattle, and, yes, Earth itself.⁴

Called to be *interdependent* rather than *subduing* for our whim.

I imagine God saying to us right now, "Make it so." Amen.

³ Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. <https://seasonofcreation.com/>

⁴ The Message (MSG) Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson