**sCoronado Community Church**

“The New Dominion”

Genesis 1:26-31

A sermon by Pastor Eric Smith

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I have a dear friend named Barbara Kilgore… the Rev. Dr. Barbara Kilgore. Barbara and I were in seminary together along with her husband John. We have been close friends since that time. Barbara is an excellent preacher and I have appreciated using her stories in my sermons over the years.

We talk together about preaching. One of her concepts is the Spinach Sermon.

A spinach sermon is like it sounds. Not the spiciest, the fanciest, or the most appealing sermonic food – but it’s good for you. Every now and then we have a spinach sermon.

I was talking with Barbara this week about the sermon today. She said, *Eric… sounds like a spinach sermon.*

You’ll have to decide.

One of the primary ideas that we take from the beginning of Genesis is the concept of *dominion.* Here is the sentence… God speaks these words…

*“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and 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.”*

It’s a blessing of sorts. All of the things – what was just named and more from earlier in the creation story – they have been created by God and they constitute the bounty of the earth.

God continues speaking: *see… I have given it to you…*

The word is dominion. As it is used here, it means

*Mastery… to rule… to have power over*

The word for dominion in its original language expresses…

the rule of God,

political power,

humanity’s mastery over nature,

and … the grip of sin on humanity

Over the last 4000 years *dominion* has been used to justify a lot of things, some worthy… others not-so-much. In the worst historical moments of Judeo-Christian expression it has been considered license to use and abuse. It’s not been all bad - there have also been better moments.

Here are some negative impacts of dominion…

* Since the 16th century, humanity has driven at least 680 species to extinction (NBC News - 2019)
* Since 1970 60% of the world’s vertebrate animals have been wiped out. (The Guardian.com)
* of the world's original old-growth tropical rainforests 34% are gone, and another 30% degraded, (Rainforest Foundation Norway - March 2021).
* of the world's fisheries 80% are already fully exploited, over-exploited, depleted, or in a state of collapse. Of the stocks of large predatory fish, such as sharks, tuna, marlin, and swordfish, 90% are already gone  (theworldcounts.com)

If you walk through the history halls in the Hotel del you’ll see pictures of fisherman showing off what they caught – massive bass, grouper… hundreds of pounds (really big fish!). There’s nothing like that in our coastal waters now – hasn’t been for a century.

No need to recite more statistics, you get the idea.

Wendell Berry is an American novelist, poet, essayist, and a notable tree-hugger. He wrote:

*We have lived by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world. We have been wrong.*

*We must change our lives, so that it will be possible to live by the contrary assumption that what is good for the world will be good for us.*

*We must recover the sense of the majesty of the creation and the ability to be worshipful in its presence. For it is only on the condition of humility and reverence before the world that our species will be able to remain in it.*

Now… this next thing falls under the heading of *God has a sense of humour…*

Karen and I live in La Mesa – literally on the edge of it. We live in a canyon and our backyard butts up against a wilderness hillside. Coyotes cruise outside our fence. While I was working on this sermon yesterday – I took a break to go outside and do some watering. In the corner of the backyard where I was watering lo and behold, there was a rattlesnake. A pretty good sized one. While I was figuring out my course of action the big guy slithered off into hiding – which was easy to do in that location. I realize, in this matter, I want dominion in our backyard. God’s sense of humor is that we have lived in La Mesa for 9 years… I have hiked the hills with the dog. Never once have I seen a rattlesnake… until I was working on this sermon.

Our dominion over nature, as presently practiced, rattlesnakes or not, needs to evolve into something better. So let’s think about how ideas in faith evolve.

God is always God, always has been, always will be. But our ideas (I mean humanity’s) of *who* *God is*, or even, *what God is,* change over time. Our opinions of what God wants from us have changed over time, too.

Example: We no longer practice the Biblical law of *an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth* as a guiding principle for crime and punishment… it was social progress at the time it was written, today it is barbaric. We don’t do law that way now.

We no longer practice ritual sacrifice in worship – we don’t carve up sheep and cattle and throw their blood on the altar to appease God. It’s Biblical… but we don’t do it now.

* We don’t observe dietary laws –
* We don’t require head coverings –
* We don’t place restrictions on wearing jewelry –
* we don’t practice a biblical model of marriage (which would include men of wealth taking multiple wives)
* and women can speak in church (have you noticed how much Biblical domination is about men dominating women? … and we still have it)

The longer perspective is that these practices are not essential ideas of faith …

Now… *you* are not intentionally bringing about the extinction of any species… except maybe the spiders in your house

*You* are not cutting down rain forests nor bringing home elephant tusks as hunting trophies

*Your* practices of dominion and support of it are different so let’s think of about some of them…

Remember that dominion is about power. Having power in relationship. You have power… and you use it. How you use it is a spiritual issue.

The stories of the *me, too* movement across culture represent a changing idea of dominion. We now clearly see that sort of dominion as the abuse that it always has been(doesn’t mean it has entirely ceased – but it is more obvious now).

Money is a tool of dominion. Some people with money use it in ways that are bad for others. Money makes you powerful.

If you follow golf you know that the Saudi’s are starting a new golf league. They have invited 17 PGA stars to participate… the invitation is a lot of money. The PGA doesn’t like it – doesn’t want it -they want to dominate. But the money the Saudi’s are offering is powerful and will change the former domination of the golf world.

Our political parties are all about domination. The days of coming to consensus for the common good are largely absent right now. It’s why we can’t get common sense gun regulation. In today’s politics dominating is everything. The problem is that people pretty much align with one party or the other. We are subjects of a political culture of domination… and it’s not nurturing… it’s destructive.

You have power. You use your power in many ways. *How do you use it in relationships?How should you use it in relationships?*

Jesus had an answer for that question. He offered a vision of how life can be. He called it the Kingdom of God. It’s a vision of God’s dominion. Jesus said to offer God dominion in our lives.

So how does that work?

What is the healthy dominion of God in our lives? It is expressing our compassion, our practice of hospitality, and our sense of humility. These attributes don’t take away your power. They give you greater power, they give you deep joy and inner peace. They don’t make your life any easier – probably more difficult – but you no longer have to doubt yourself about whether or not, deep down, you are a good person. You trust God and trust God’s estimation of yourself… that you are, I am, a beloved child of God.

Karen and I met when I came to be the pastor of the church she was a member of in Pasadena. The church had a week-long family camp each year up in the Sequoias. We had a devotional time called morning watch.

One of the regular participants was Ed Carlson. Ed was one of my favorite folks. He was a man of stature. He was tall had a graceful yet commanding presence. I thought of Ed as a person with deep roots in life… steady and wise. Ed had had two marriages. The first did not go well. The second was beautiful. He had children from both marriages. The children from the first marriage had a lot of pain in their lives, which I didn’t know much about, except that I knew it was there for them. That left an indelible mark on Ed Carlson.

Ed was a spiritual person. At the morning devotion time he spoke and said,

*… I have learned that it’s best to accept responsibility when you have made a mistake. Usually when we make mistakes we get very defensive about them. I have tried to stop doing that. Now when I make a mistake, I apologize right away. It really throws people off. Often they end up hugging me. People are so suspicious and anxious, if you open up to them they just melt.*

Ed had learned that his willingness to let go of domination and own his errors added power and grace to his life.

That’s what Jesus knew… and preached… and practiced. It might be hard for you to let go of dominating power, however you express it, but you can do it. Your faith can evolve.

Today, in this 21st century, our concept of *dominion* must evolve rapidly. Stewardship of God’s Creation and survival of life require it.

The *dominion* of humanity has to be understood in a new way. You can start today.