

The Stewardship of Space – Week 2

Parables and Teachings with Creation Themes

Opening Prayer

Creator God,
You scattered the stars in the heavens and sowed the seeds of life upon the earth.
You made soil to be fruitful, air to be pure, and water to be living and clean.

We thank you for entrusting us with the care of your creation.
Forgive us when we have hardened our hearts like the path, neglected the soil of our communities,
or allowed the thorns of greed and worry to choke your gifts.

Open our ears to hear your word, our eyes to see your beauty in the world around us,
and our hands to tend the earth with love.
May the seeds of your kingdom grow within us, bearing fruit in lives of justice, compassion, and care
for all that you have made.

Through Jesus Christ, the Sower of life, we pray.
Amen.

The New Testament doesn't give us parables directly about "the care of nature" in a modern ecological sense—but Jesus consistently uses *creation imagery* to teach spiritual truths. These parables and sayings can be connected to themes of stewardship, responsibility, and respect for God's world:

Parable of the Sower — Matthew 13:3–9 and 13:18–23 (NRSVue) (also appears in Mark 4:1–20; Luke 8:4–15)

Matthew 13:3 And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell on a path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶ But when the sun rose, they were scorched, and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ If you have ears, hear!"

¹⁸ "Hear, then, the parable of the sower. ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet such a person has no root but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of this age and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³ But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

Key Imagery and Themes

- Imagery of soil types, seeds, sun, and thorns. (*Another word for "thorns" could be "weeds").

- Humans interact with the land; conditions (healthy soil vs. depleted ground) affect growth. In Jesus' time, seed was often scattered before plowing. Some naturally fell on paths or rocky ground. His listeners would have recognized the importance of preparing the soil well if they wanted a good harvest.
- God's creation is lavish, scattered across all kinds of "soil" — even where it might not grow. God's love enfolds all space.
- Stewardship link: We are called to "tend the soil" of both our souls and the earth so that life can flourish.

Soil and the Heart / Soil and Creation

- **Reflection:** Jesus compares different responses to the word of God to types of soil. How might this analogy apply to the way we care for the environment and God's creation? Can a "hard path" or "rocky soil" represent attitudes toward creation in our communities?
- **Action:** If the seed represents God's creative action, what practical steps can we take to ensure that our "soil" — our homes, neighborhoods, and workplaces — supports growth and flourishing of the environment?

Bearing Fruit / Small Actions

- **Reflection:** The seed that falls on good soil bears fruit — some thirtyfold, some sixty, some a hundred. What might "bearing fruit" look like in the context of stewardship of creation?
- **Action:** The parable shows the possibility of the abundance of creation. What small, daily habits (recycling, conserving energy, planting, protecting local wildlife) might seem minor but have a positive impact on creation?

Thorns and Obstacles

- **Reflection:** The parable mentions thorns that choke the seed. What are the modern "thorns" or obstacles that prevent us from caring for God's creation effectively (e.g., greed, indifference, overconsumption)? How can we address them in our daily lives?
- **Action:** What are the modern "thorns" in our society — habits, policies, or attitudes — that harm the environment? How might we work to remove or mitigate these obstacles?

Bearing fruit on good soil

- **Reflection:** Jesus speaks lastly of the seed that falls on fertile ground, yielding in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty. How much abundance must we have in order to satisfy God? Ourselves? How much faith is enough to be proclaimed a "good yield?"
 - **Action:** Even if we feel that faith guides us, there is always the potential for a feeling of inadequacy of faith and hope. How can we reach out to those who are in need of reassurance that God always loves them?
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Parable of the Growing Seed — Mark 4:26–29 (NRSVue)

Mark 4:26 He also said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground²⁷ and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how.²⁸ The earth produces of itself first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle because the harvest has come.”

Key Imagery and Themes

- Imagery of seed, soil, growth process, harvest.
- “The earth produces of itself” (*Greek: automate*, meaning “spontaneously” or “by its own power”). In first-century Galilee, sowing and harvesting were manual and dependent on the rhythms of rain and soil health. Farmers recognized their limited control. Once seed was sown, they relied on the earth and God to bring growth.
- Emphasizes God’s hidden work in creation and natural processes that lead to abundance.
- The sower’s role is limited: they scatter seed and then wait in trust, not controlling the outcome. The parable highlights God’s sovereignty in bringing about the kingdom — and by extension, the fruitfulness of creation. Human beings participate through faithful sowing and patient trust, not domination. Once again, we are caretakers.
- Stewardship link: God designed creation to be fruitful, resilient, and self-sustaining. Our role is to cooperate with this natural order, not exploit or disrupt it. This speaks directly to environmental stewardship: instead of forcing growth through harmful means, we are called to honor and support the processes God has set in motion.

Trusting God’s Work in Creation

- **Reflection:** The farmer in the parable scatters seed and then trusts the earth to produce. What does this tell us about God’s ongoing work in creation, even when we cannot see it?
- **Action:** Where in our communities might we practice more *trust* in natural processes — for example, through regenerative agriculture, reducing interference, or allowing ecosystems to heal over time?

Patience and Process

- **Reflection:** “First the stalk, then the head, then the full grain.” Growth is gradual and not fully in human hands. How might this challenge our culture’s desire for quick results, especially in environmental efforts?
- **Action:** What long-term practices (both in the environment and in human relationships) require patience and trust, even when results aren’t immediately visible?

Cooperative Stewardship

- **Reflection:** The farmer’s role is active but limited. How can we understand stewardship as cooperation with rather than control over creation?
 - **Action:** Identify one way your congregation or community could shift from a model of “managing nature” to partnering with nature.
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The Birds of the Air and Lilies of the Field (Matthew 6:25–34; Luke 12:22–32) (*not a parable but a teaching illustration*)

— **This is a rich and beloved teaching of Jesus** because it connects trust in God’s provision with attentive observation of creation.

Matthew 6:25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³² For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

³⁴ “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

Key Imagery and Themes

- Birds of the air — God feeds them without their sowing or storing. Birds such as sparrows and doves were abundant in Galilee. People observed their daily patterns and saw how they survived without storing grain like humans did.
- Lilies of the field— clothed in splendor without human effort.
- Grass of the field / wildflowers — fleeting, yet cared for by God. In first-century Palestine, wildflowers covered the hillsides during spring. Their beauty was striking but temporary — they were dried quickly in the sun and used as fuel for ovens. Jesus’ audience would have been familiar with this vivid contrast between their radiant splendor and their short existence.
- Jesus uses *creation itself* as a living illustration of divine provision and an invitation to trust, not anxiety.
- Refrain (“worry” repeats five times): “Do not worry... Seek first the kingdom of God.” Jesus invites his listeners to look closely at nature — not as decoration, but as teacher and testimony to God’s faithfulness.
- God’s provision is woven into creation itself. The birds and flowers “preach” trust in their very existence. *This teaching is not an invitation to passivity, but to freedom from anxious grasping*, which often drives human exploitation of the earth. Stewardship begins with humility: recognizing that creation flourishes because of God’s sustaining power, not human control.
- Stewardship link: If creation matters to God, it should matter to us. Observing the natural world can reshape our attitudes toward both provision and possessions. Instead of dominating creation out of fear for survival, we are called to trust God’s care and to mirror that care in how we treat the world around us.

Observing God’s Provision in Creation

- **Reflection:** Jesus invites us to “look at the birds” and “consider the lilies.” How might regularly observing the natural world deepen our trust in God’s provision? What spiritual lessons can creation teach us?
- **Action:** Identify a simple way your congregation or household can incorporate regular attentiveness to creation — as a spiritual discipline.

Trust vs. Anxiety

- **Reflection:** Jesus contrasts God’s provision with human worry. How might anxiety about the future (economic, environmental, personal) affect how we treat the earth and its resources?
- **Action:** What practices can help us shift from anxious or competitive consumption to trust-filled stewardship?

Valuing What God Values

- **Reflection:** God clothes grass and flowers with care, even though they are temporary. What does this reveal about how God values creation? How might this challenge utilitarian views of the natural world (valuing it only for what it provides us)?
- **Action:** Identify one way your community can demonstrate care for non-utilitarian aspects of creation — such as preserving beauty, biodiversity, or habitats that don’t serve immediate human needs.

Closing Thought

Creation itself is a teacher. When we look at birds and flowers with attentive hearts, we learn to trust the God who provides for all — and to care for creation as God does, not out of anxiety, but out of love.
