

**SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY**

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of the First Book of Moses, called Genesis.²

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

“And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

“And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day.

“And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to

rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day. And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

“And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

“And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. And God saw every thing that he

had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.³

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

“John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was

given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”

Or,

Here beginneth the twenty-first Chapter of the Revelation of St. John the Divine.⁴

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed [SHOWD] me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jas-

⁵ A reed cut to a known length for use as a measuring rod was a *kanon*, from which we get our word *canon* for a rule, and therefore for something that is formulated according to a rule, or for a person who is bound to a rule of life, as in the *Canon of Scripture* or the *Canon of Consecration* or as in a *Canon Regular of St. Augustine*.

⁶ Genesis 1:28 (KJV).

⁷ St. Matthew 25:14-30; *cf.* St. Luke 19:11-27.

⁸ Priest Assistant, Christ Anglican Catholic Church, Metairie LA; Honorary Canon, the Diocese of the Resurrection; Honorary Canon and Canon to the Ordinary, The Diocese of New Orleans, The Anglican Catholic Church.

twelve reminders of that Society’s religious and moral principals is set before each member and each member is asked to consider that “Queries” and to meditate upon its application to his or her own life. Some of these “Queries” are particularly relevant to this topic of stewardship, such as these two, which are taken from the book of “Faith and Practice” of one Yearly Meeting:

“8. ... Do you strive to educate yourselves and those in your care with the spiritual needs of the world? Do you support by prayer and systematic giving those who are laboring to extend the realm of Jesus Christ? Are you sensitive to the material needs of those within the meeting and in the local community? How do you use your spiritual gifts in serving humanity as God grants you light to see such service?

“9. As Christians do you consistently practice principles of love and good will toward all God’s people, toward the earth and all creation? Do you work actively for peace and justice by living in such a way that harmony results?”

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The Rev’d Canon John A. Hollister⁸
February 20, 2011.

¹ *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 34 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxv (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxiii (CIPBC 1963).

² Genesis 1:1—2:3 (KJV).

³ St. John 1:1-18 (KJV).

⁴ Revelation 21:1-18 (KJV).

per stone, clear as crystal; And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he that talked with me had a golden reed⁵ to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel. And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

These words, “subdue [the earth]” and “have dominion over ... every living thing that moveth upon the earth”, confer on mankind the mastery of the created order. This makes it appear as though, under God, we are the lords of creation, which He has given to us for our use and enjoyment. However, when we contemplate the joys of this mas-

tery and dominion, we often tend to overlook the responsibilities that accompany it.

1. God made us not *lords* but *stewards* over His creation.

The terms of God's gift to us are twofold: we are to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and then, following upon that, we are given the dominion over that earth. In other words, our control of the created order is subsidiary to, and is intended to serve, our flourishing and growth in numbers.

That is, God's gift of dominion over nature was not intended to benefit just one generation of humanity, but rather is for the sustenance of all humanity, in every generation from Adam's time until the end of time. But that means that each subsequent generation of humans is born into the same entitlements as was those with which God gifted the first generation of humans. And each subsequent generation cannot enjoy its entitlements as God intended unless those things to which it is entitled have been preserved and passed on to it intact and undiminished.

So implicit in God's gift to Adam and Eve is an inescapable principle of *stewardship*. Each generation of human beings has only *temporary* dominion and control over the created world. While that generation is permitted to use that world for its sustenance and enjoyment, it must do so wisely and prudently. This is because it is obligated to pass that world on to its successors essentially undamaged and undiminished, so its successors can enjoy the same benefits in their turns.

Thus we are not, in fact, the *owners* of this world but are only its *trustees*. And trustees are obliged to exercise the utmost good faith and prudence in the interests of those who are their beneficiaries; in fact, they are required at all

times to place the interests of those beneficiaries above their own interests.

Among other things, this principle, which is inherent in the concept of dominion over the earth, is the Scriptural charter for the ecological movement.

2. The principle of our stewardship over the created order is actually a general principle that applies to all areas of our lives.

It was not just the air and water, the rocks and trees, the fish and animals over which God gave us care, custody, and control. He gave us other gifts as well, gifts that are equally intended to sustain us during this life, to enable us to fulfill the tasks He has set before us, and, in reasonable measure, to enjoy ourselves while we do so.

We call these gifts our *talents*, in a metaphor taken from Our Lord's parable in St. Matthew's Gospel of the three servants and how they managed the talents, or weights of metal bullion used as money, with which their master had entrusted them.⁷

These talents include, at the very least, our time, our energy and dedication, and our personal skills and abilities. And because these talents are given to us for our sustenance, support, and enjoyment, they, too, are subject to the rule of stewardship. We are all obliged to use them just as we use the physical gifts of this world, that is, as wisely and prudently as we are able, to further the service of God and of future generations.

Conclusion:

The Society of Friends, better known as the Quakers, have an old and salutary custom of an annual cycle of reflections called "The Queries". Each month in turn, one of