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Redwoods Presbyterian Church
Larkspur, California
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Psalm 98; Luke 4:14-21
“How We Care”
“All of Life and Relational Stewardship”

For this sermon, we need to have in hand “A Brief Statement of Faith” printed in the insert.

[For readers, it is embedded in this sermon].

Suellen brought home coffee filters this week from Whole Foods. They are called “If You Care FSC Certified/Certified Compostable Unbleached Totally Chlorine Free Coffee Filters.”

One can compost the filters for backyard/home composting and since they are chlorine-free, no chlorine or its derivatives get dumped into lakes, rivers or streams. Since they are not dumped in landfills, they do not release methane – a powerful greenhouse gas that contributes to global warming. The paper is overseen by the Forest Stewardship Council, which accounts for the FSC in the title.

Before Suellen brought the filters home, I had already titled this sermon “How We Care.” It is my stewardship sermon and has the same principles as promulgated by this coffee filter company.

Instead, our “company,” so to speak, is the church. Stewardship in the church is how we support the church and its mission with our time, talents and finances and on Stewardship Sunday like today we bring in our pledges for the following year’s budget. When we do so, we show how we care.

Last Sunday night, Suellen and I were at Anna and Alan’s home for dinner. I mentioned at the table that next Sunday was Stewardship Sunday and I was preaching on stewardship and I would bring a holistic perspective. I figured that we support the church financially because of our holistic concern for all of life.

In our conversation, there emerged a wonderful sense of stewardship as relationship. It struck me that relational stewardship is what we are about as Christians. To illustrate this point along with all of life I thought it best to go through the latest confession in our Book of Confessions: “A Brief

Statement of Faith.” There we see in full-blown perspective how we care for all of life and our relationship with all of life.

From the get-go, the statement affirms our relationship with God, which is the bedrock of relationship with the world. Let us read the first paragraph together: Number 1.

1.

In life and in death we belong to God.
Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
whom alone we worship and serve.

This week’s presbytery retreat will revolve around the work of popular social work professor and researcher, Brené Brown, whose books have repeatedly been #1 in the New York Times.

In her book, *The Gifts of Imperfection*, she writes, “After collecting thousands of stories, I’m willing to call this a fact: A deep sense of love and belonging is an irreducible need of all women, men, and children. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong.”

Our statement of faith affirms this: We belong to God and God loves us. Love is what it’s all about. Churches are fundamentally about love and belonging. We care because God cares.

Let us read the second paragraph of our statement of faith, #2, and see where that takes us from a stewardship perspective.

2.

We trust in Jesus Christ,
Fully human, fully God.
Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:
preaching good news to the poor
and release to the captives,
teaching by word and deed
and blessing the children,
healing the sick
and binding up the brokenhearted,
eating with outcasts,
forgiving sinners,
and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.
Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,

Jesus was crucified,
 suffering the depths of human pain
 and giving his life for the sins of the world.
 God raised Jesus from the dead,
 vindicating his sinless life,
 breaking the power of sin and evil,
 delivering us from death to life eternal.

Psalm 98 and the Luke passage read earlier affirm “All of Life and Relational Stewardship” and so does the statement we just read.

Where do we see stewardship expressed in this affirmation of Jesus Christ? We see it in concern for the poor, those in prison (and the prison system), in children, in those who are sick (and our healthcare system), in the personal and relational brokenhearted, in outcasts such as the homeless and in those who sin against us (when was the last time someone spoke ill of you for no apparent reason?).

The church is concerned about all these things, in fact, the confession states that Jesus gave his life for the sins of the world and in doing so, he broke the power of sin and evil. That’s the amazing grace stewardship of Jesus. Our faithfulness to Jesus Christ in active ministry is our stewardship.

Let us read together #3, the statement about God.

3.
 We trust in God,
 whom Jesus called Abba, Father.
 In sovereign love God created the world good
 and makes everyone equally in God's image
 male and female, of every race and people,
 to live as one community.
 But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator.
 Ignoring God's commandments,
 we violate the image of God in others and ourselves,
 accept lies as truth,
 exploit neighbor and nature,
 and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.
 We deserve God's condemnation.
 Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.
 In everlasting love,
 the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people
 to bless all families of the earth.
 Hearing their cry,
 God delivered the children of Israel

from the house of bondage.
 Loving us still,
 God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.
 Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,
 like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,
 God is faithful still.

Where do we see stewardship of all of life in this statement? There are three big issues: Everyone is made in God's image therefore, everyone is accepted; media and political integrity is affirmed in the statement where it says people accept "lies as truth," (therefore, we oppose lies), and the pressing issue of the day, environmental justice and sustainability is affirmed against those who "threaten death to our planet entrusted to our care." In all these areas, we are called to be good stewards.

Our financial support of the church is our ministry and mission in fairness, peace, equality and justice. These qualities are affirmed in the next statement.

Let us read together #4, the statement about the Holy Spirit.

4.
 We trust in God the Holy Spirit,
 everywhere the giver and renewer of life.
 The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,
 sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,
 and binds us together with all believers
 in the one body of Christ, the church.
 The same Spirit
 who inspired the prophets and apostles
 rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,
 engages us through the Word proclaimed,
 claims us in the waters of baptism,
 feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
 and calls women and men to all ministries of the church.
 In a broken and fearful world
 the Spirit gives us courage
 to pray without ceasing
 to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
 to unmask idolatries in church and culture,
 to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
 and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.
 In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
 we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
 and to live holy and joyful lives,

even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, Come, Lord Jesus!

This statement is primarily about our faithfulness as Christians in worship, prayer and service.

Brené Brown has a striking definition of “compassion” in her gifts of imperfection book. She writes, “Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It is a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity.”

There is an enormous challenge here. In fact, when we spoke about relational stewardship at Anna and Alan’s home, we spoke in terms of our equal and shared relationship with all of humanity and the earth. What does it mean when we have an equal relationship with the outcast, prisoner or homeless street person? How do we care for forests, oceans, and plains when we know that they are our sisters and brothers?

A Brief Statement of Faith spells it out for us in explicit and faith-affirming terms. And so, we live our faith the best we can. We engage in stewardship the best we can. And we give to the church for this engagement the best we can.

Let us conclude the sermon by saying together the final words of the statement of faith, #5.

5.

With believers in every time and place,
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Glory is to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

