

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Be Stewards, not exploiters, of God’s earth”
(Part II of “The Kingdom of God and UM Social Principles”)
April 19, 2026

Scripture

Matthew 25:14-30
Psalm 24:1-2
Psalm 8:1-9

Core Idea and purpose

Core theological ideas from earlier sermons in the series:

- (04/12/2026) The Kingdom of God is not just a future event or the place we go when we die. It is a present reality for us to live and pursue – encouraging the world to be more in line with life as God intends.

Core theological idea: God calls us to be good stewards, not exploiters, of the earth

Challenge/purpose: To encourage people to be good stewards of the earth.

The Sermon

During the time between working as a Juvenile Probation Officer and going to Seminary, I became a clerk in a UPS store. I thought it would be an easy job that would pay my bills until I became a student pastor...but I was wrong. The job was much more difficult and humbling than I had anticipated. It took me several weeks to master financial reconciliation at the end of each day. It was also a challenge to quickly and accurately calculate the cost of shipping items. The paper in the receipt dispenser would always need re-filling when there was a long line of impatient customers and that’s when the paper would keep jamming.

However, I did learn the job well enough for the store owners to trust me to run the store on my own. They went on a two-week Hawaiian vacation and left me in charge. It was me and no one else running the store. During those two weeks, I had to decide: Will I run the store as a good steward or will I run the store as an exploitative employee. Running the store as a steward meant that I would run it in accordance with the owner’s directions and that I would do my very best to make sure the store was profitable. As a steward, I would want the store to thrive. Running the store as an exploitative employee meant that I would do just enough to not get fired and receive my paycheck. As an exploitative employee, I would not care if the store made a profit and thrived.

One day, during the two weeks I was left alone, I made a mistake. A person came in with a bike frame that he wanted to ship off. I found the appropriate box,

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packed the bike inside the box, weighed it and measured the height, width & length of the box. I inputted the weight and measurements into the computer and came up with a very low price for the shipping. The customer happily paid the low price and left. As I thought about the low price, I realized I must have made a mistake. So, I double checked my work and discovered that I put the height measurement in the space for the length measurement, causing the computer to calculate the wrong price.

At this moment, I had to decide. Would I be a good steward or an exploitative employee? I was tempted to ignore the mistake and be an exploitative employee. The owners would never have known. But I decided to be a good steward. I recalculated the cost, this time putting the measurements in the right places. Then I paid the difference between the incorrect price and the right price with my own money.

In the same way I had to decide to be a good steward of my boss’ store, we must decide to be good stewards of the earth. The Lord God Almighty calls us to be stewards, not exploiters, of the earth. Stewards create the conditions for life (biodiversity) to thrive. Exploiters of the earth use the earth’s resources without regard for how it may affect its biodiversity. We all use the earth’s resources to live and thrive. When we eat salad or drink water, we are using the earth’s resources to live & thrive. That alone doesn’t make us exploiters. We become exploiters of the earth when we use the earth’s resources to the detriment of biodiversity.

God is a God of life. Jesus, the one who is fully human and fully God, experienced death and defeated death so we can have eternal life. We celebrated this two weeks ago and we continue to celebrate this. So, it shouldn’t surprise us that God calls us to be stewards, not exploiters of the earth.

In Genesis 1:28 God tells humanity to fill and subdue the earth. In other words, God calls us to govern the earth. We must understand this verse while also considering Genesis 2:15, which says, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden **to work it and take care of it.**” This means that God has commissioned us to govern the earth as stewards, not exploiters. As previously stated, stewards create the conditions for biodiversity to thrive while exploiters use up or destroy the earth’s resources at the expense of biodiversity.

In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus tells us the Parable of the Talents. In this parable, a rich man entrusted some of his wealth to his servants before going on a long journey. To one person, he gave 5 talents, to another he gave 2 talents, and to the third servant, he gave 1 talent. When the rich man returned from his long trip, he discovered that the servants with 5 and 2 talents used them wisely. This

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means they used them in accordance with the rich man’s desires. So, the rich man rewarded them. The servant with one talent did nothing with his talent. This was not what the rich man wanted. So, he punished him.

Now, let’s consider the earth to be one BIG talent. God gave the earth to humanity as a talent. God expects us to be good stewards of this talent, which means God wants us to use the earth in accordance with God’s loving will. So, we ask: Is it God’s will for us to use up all the fossil fuels and cause global warming? Is it God’s will for us to pollute the waters so that fish die and we can no longer drink it? Is it God’s will for us to dump so much plastic in the ocean that it becomes toxic to marine life? The big question: What will Jesus say when He returns and finds the earth in such a mess? We, humanity, may find ourselves in the same position as the servant with only one talent because we did not care for the one BIG talent (the earth) by following God’s will.

The United Methodist Church recognizes God’s call for us to be stewards of the earth. In the UM Social Principles, there is a section called “Community of All Creation”. The preface to this section says:

*We affirm that all creation belongs to God and is a manifestation of God’s goodness and providential care. Human beings, nonhuman animals, plants, and other sentient and non-sentient beings participate in the community of creation, and their flourishing depends on the care of all God’s creation. Rather than treating creation as if it were placed here solely for humanity’s use and consumption, we are called to practice responsible **stewardship** and to live in right relationship with the Creator and with the whole of God’s creation (Genesis 1:26-31, 2:15, and 9:9-10; Matthew 6:26-30; Romans 8:22-24). We are also called to honor the role of every part of creation in healing the whole; thus, we praise God with the whole of creation (Psalm 148) and recognize that we are part of complex ecosystems, all valued by God.*

*We affirm our sacred calling to be responsible **stewards** and to lovingly tend all that God has wrought. We recognize the inherent worth of God’s creation, celebrate earth’s abundance and diversity, and, along with the entirety of the cosmos, give praise to its creator. We recognize we are interconnected members of a complex ecosystem, intricate webs of life, all of which have their origins in God’s gracious act of Creation.*

This statement from UM Social Principles is not anything new. Over 900 years ago, Francis of Assisi taught us to care for nature. The Roman Catholic church has declared him to be the Patron Saint of Ecology.

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He [Francis of Assisi] grew up as a rich, spoiled brat. As a young man, he joined the army, hoping to be knighted and advance his socio-economic status. But, while on a campaign, he met Jesus. He then returned to the city of Assisi, gave away his possessions and money and started living among the poor. He also became a priest and founded the Franciscan Priesthood.

Along with working for the poor and advocating for peace & love, Francis also encouraged a deep love for nature. He knew that love for nature and love for neighbors is in a direct relationship. The more people love nature, the more people will love their neighbors. He said, “If you have men who will exclude any of God’s creatures from the shelter of compassion and pity, you will have men who will deal likewise with their fellow men.”¹

So, what can we do to be good stewards of the earth? As a congregation, we can create a compost bin or eventually start using solar panels. As individuals we could recycle more, speak out and, especially, vote for the candidates with the best environmental record. I know that when we think about what we can do as individuals, small groups, or local congregations, we wonder how much of a difference we can make. But we can unite with other groups and, **with God’s grace**, make a big difference.

Let me tell you a story. There was this older gentleman who woke up one morning and decided to walk along the beach. As he walked upon the beach, he came upon thousands and thousands, maybe tens of thousands, of starfish stranded on the sand. As he continued his walk, he came upon a ten-year-old girl who was picking up a starfish, one at a time, looking at it for a few seconds and then tossing it back into the ocean.

The older man asked her, “What are you doing?”

The little girl looked back at the man with a surprised look and replied, “Well, sir, I am throwing the starfish back into the ocean, so they don’t dry up and die”

The man gave a thoughtful look and advised the girl, “There are thousands of starfish here. There is no way you can save them all.”

The girl then picked up a starfish, held it up and explained, “Yes sir, that may be true, but I can make a difference for this one,” and then threw that starfish back into the ocean.

¹ [Top 54 Saint Francis of Assisi Quotes \(NATURE\) \(graciousquotes.com\)](https://graciousquotes.com/50-of-the-most-famous-saint-francis-of-assisi-quotes/); [50 of the Most Famous Saint Francis of Assisi Quotes - AnQuotes.com](https://anquotes.com/50-of-the-most-famous-saint-francis-of-assisi-quotes/)

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Many of us know this story. It’s a good lesson. As individuals we can make a difference even though we can’t always solve the big problem. But I would like to add to this story.

The old man recognizes this little girl’s wisdom. So, he joins the little girl and begins to throw the starfish back into the sea one by one. Another person walks along and asks them what they are doing. So, this person also begins to throw the starfish back into the ocean. Then a fourth, fifth, and sixth person comes along. Before it was all over, 100 people stopped to throw the starfish back into the ocean and, before the starfish had time to dry out and die, the large crowd of people threw all the starfish back into the ocean.

With God’s grace, God’s loving presence in the world, we can be like the little girl and influence other people to be good stewards of the earth. We can even influence our government representatives and change government policy. With God’s grace, we can make a difference.

Let’s pray.

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Sermon Outline

- I. During the time between working as a Juvenile Probation Officer and going to Seminary, I became a clerk in a UPS store.
 - A. I thought it would be an easy job that would pay my bills until I became a student pastor...but I was wrong.
 - The job was much more difficult and humbling than I had anticipated.
 - It took me several weeks to master financial reconciliation at the end of each day.
 - It was also a challenge to quickly and accurately calculate the cost of shipping items.
 - The paper in the receipt dispenser would always need re-filling when there was a long line of impatient customers and that’s when the paper would keep jamming.
 - B. However, I did learn the job well enough for the store owners to trust me to run the store on my own.
 - They went on a two-week Hawaiian vacation and left me in charge.
 - It was me and no one else running the store.
 - C. During those two weeks, I had to decide:
 - Will I run the store as a good steward or will I run the store as an exploitative employee.
 - Running the store as a steward meant that I would run it in accordance with the owner’s directions and that I would do my very best to make sure the store was profitable.
 - As a steward, I would want the store to thrive.
 - Running the store as an exploitative employee meant that I would do just enough to not get fired and receive my paycheck.

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- As an exploitative employee, I would not care if the store made a profit and thrived.

D. One day, during the 2 weeks when I was on my own, I made a mistake.

- A person came in with a bike frame that he wanted to ship off.
- I found the appropriate box, packed the bike inside the box, weighed it and measured the height, width & length of the box.
- I inputted the weight and measurements into the computer and came up with a very low price for the shipping.
- The customer happily paid the low price and left.
- As I thought about the low price, I realized I must have made a mistake.
 - So, I double checked my work and discovered that I put the height measurement in the space for the length measurement, causing the computer to calculate the wrong price.
- At this moment, I had to decide.
 - Would I be a good steward or an exploitative employee?
 - I was tempted to ignore the mistake and be an exploitative employee.
 - The owners would never have known.
 - But I decided to be a good steward.
 - I recalculated the cost, this time putting the measurements in the right places.
 - Then I paid the difference between the incorrect price and the right price with my own money.

E. In the same way I had to decide to be a good steward of my boss’ store, we must decide to be good stewards of the earth.

II. The Lord God Almighty calls us to be stewards, not exploiters, of the earth.

A. Stewards create the conditions for life (biodiversity) to thrive.

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B. Exploiters of the earth use the earth’s resources without regard for how it may affect its biodiversity.

C. We all use the earth’s resources to live and thrive.

- When we eat a salad or drink water, we use the earth’s resources to live & thrive.
- We become exploiters of the earth when we use the earth’s resources to the detriment of biodiversity.

D. God is a God of life.

- Jesus, the one who is fully human and fully God, experienced death and defeated death so we can have eternal life.
- We celebrated this two weeks ago.
- So, it shouldn’t surprise us that God calls us to be stewards, not exploiters of the earth.

III. In Genesis 1:28 God tells humanity to fill and subdue the earth.

A. In other words, God calls us to govern the earth.

B. We must, however, understand this verse while also considering Genesis 2:15, which says, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden **to work it and take care of it.**”

C. This means that God has commissioned us to govern the earth as stewards, not exploiters.

- Stewards create the conditions for life to thrive while
- exploiters use up or destroy the earth’s resources at the expense of life.

IV. In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus tells us the Parable of the Talents.

A. In this parable, a rich man entrusted some of his wealth to his servants before going on a long journey.

- To one person, he gave 5 talents, to another he gave 2 talents, and to the third servant, he gave 1 talent.

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- When the rich man returned from his long trip, he discovered that the servants with 5 and 2 talents used them wisely.
 - This means they used them in accordance with his desires.
 - So, the rich man rewarded them.
- The servant with one talent did nothing with his talent.
 - This was not what the rich man wanted.
 - So, he punished him.

B. Now, let’s consider the earth to be one BIG talent.

- God gave the earth to humanity as a talent.
- God expects us to be good stewards of this talent, which means God wants us to use the earth in accordance with God’s loving will.
 - So, we ask:
 - Is it God’s will for us to use up all the fossil fuels and cause global warming?
 - Is it God’s will for us to pollute the waters so that fish die and we can no longer drink it?
 - Is it God’s will for us to dump so much plastic in the ocean that it becomes toxic to marine life?
 - The big question: What will Jesus say when He returns and finds the earth in such a mess?
 - We, humanity, may find ourselves in the same position as the servant with only one talent because we did not care for the one BIG talent (the earth) by following God’s will.

V. The United Methodist Church recognizes God’s call for us to be stewards of the earth.

A. In the UM Social Principles, there is a section called “Community of All Creation”.

B. The preface to this section says:

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We affirm our sacred calling to be responsible stewards and to lovingly tend all that God has wrought. We recognize the inherent worth of God’s creation, celebrate earth’s abundance and diversity, and, along with the entirety of the cosmos, give praise to its creator. We recognize we are interconnected members of a complex ecosystem, intricate webs of life, all of which have their origins in God’s gracious act of Creation.

VI. This statement from UM Social Principles is not anything new.

- A. Over 900 years ago, Francis of Assisi taught us to care for nature.
 - The Roman Catholic church has declared him to be the Patron Saint of Ecology.
- B. He [Francis of Assisi] grew up as a rich, spoiled brat.
 - As a young man, he joined the army, hoping to be knighted and advance his socio-economic status.
 - But, while on a campaign, he met Jesus.
 - He then returned to the city of Assisi, gave away his possessions and money and started living among the poor.

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- He also became a priest and founded the Franciscan Priesthood.
- C. Along with working for the poor and advocating for peace & love, Francis also encouraged a deep love for nature.
- He knew that love for nature and love for neighbors is in a direct relationship.
 - The more people love nature, the more people will love their neighbors.
 - He said, “If you have men who will exclude any of God’s creatures from the shelter of compassion and pity, you will have men who will deal likewise with their fellow men.”²

VII. So, what can we do to be good stewards of the earth?

A. As a congregation, we can

- create a compost bin
and
- eventually start using solar panels.

B. As individuals we could...

- recycle more,
- speak out
- and. especially,
- vote for the candidates with the best environmental record.

C. I know that when we think about what we can do as individuals, small groups, or local congregations, we wonder how much of a difference we can make.

- But we can unite together with other groups and, with God’s grace, make a big difference.

VIII. Let me tell you a story.

² [Top 54 Saint Francis of Assisi Quotes \(NATURE\) \(graciousquotes.com\); 50 of the Most Famous Saint Francis of Assisi Quotes - AnQuotes.com](#)

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- A. There was this older gentleman who woke up one morning and decided to walk along the beach.
- As he walked upon the beach, he came upon thousands and thousands, maybe tens of thousands, of starfish stranded on the sand.
 - As he continued his walk, he came upon a ten-year-old girl who was picking up a starfish, one at a time, looking at it for a few seconds and then tossing it back into the ocean.
- B. The older man asked her, “What are you doing?”
- The little girl looked back at the man with a surprised look and replied, “Well, sir, I am throwing the starfish back into the ocean, so they don’t dry up and die”
 - The man gave a thoughtful look and advised the girl, “There are thousands of starfish here. There is no way you can save them all.”
 - The girl then picked up a starfish, held it up and explained, “Yes sir, that may be true, but I can make a difference for this one,” and then threw that starfish back into the ocean.
- C. Many of us know this story.
- It’s a good lesson.
 - As individuals we can make a difference even though we can’t always solve the big problem.
 - But I would like to add to this story.
- D. The old man recognizes this little girl’s wisdom.
- So, he joins the little girl and begins to throw the starfish back into the sea one by one.
 - Another person walks along and asks them what they are doing.
 - So, this person also begins to throw the starfish back into the ocean.

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- Then a fourth, fifth, and sixth person comes along.
 - Before it was all over, 100 people stopped to throw the starfish back into the ocean and, before the starfish had time to dry out and die, the large crowd of people threw all the starfish back into the ocean.
- E. With God’s grace, God’s loving presence in the world, we can be like the little girl and influence other people to be good stewards of the earth.
- We can even influence our government representatives and change government policy.
 - With God’s grace, we can make a difference.

Let’s pray.