

17th Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 22, Year C
A Sermon Preached by The Rev Ian M Delinger
on October 12, 2025

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4 / Psalm 37:1-10 / 2 Timothy 1:1-14 / Luke 17:5-10

*May we guard the good treasure entrusted to us,
with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us. Amen.*

I have 2 bits of trivia for you. One is local and the first is California trivia.

- What is the California State Animal and where does it live?
 - California's State Animal is the California grizzly bear. Where does it live? The California grizzly was completely extinct by the 1920s. California is the only state in the union that carries the image of an extinct animal on its state flag and seal¹.
- What is the Central Coast reference in Looney Toons?
 - Pismo Clams. In *Ali Baba Bunny*, Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck are on their way to Pismo Beach. When they eventually get there, Bugs Bunny finds a pearl in a Pismo Clam. That was in 1957.
 - What has happened to the Pismo Clam since 1957? The Pismo Clam declined from their heyday in the first half of the 20C, and were virtually absent for the last several decades. Until recently, the last legal-sized clam was dug up in 1993. But we're starting to see a comeback!
 - Why did we lose the Pismo Clam? It could have been for a variety of reasons: certainly, the over-harvesting that took place when the clam

¹ *Ursus arctos californicus*: California's State Animal is the California grizzly bear. As the state's largest and fiercest predator, the grizzly had California to itself for hundreds of thousands of years. They lived 20-30 years, were 4.5 feet at the shoulder and were 8 feet tall when standing. Females weighed about 400 pounds while males weighed 1,000 pounds. They could run 35 miles per hour for short distances, had a humped shoulder, and were brown-golden in color. The loss of habitat and over-hunting by a rapidly growing human population led to their complete extinction by the 1920s. In 1953, the California grizzly became the official State Animal and remains one of the state's most enduring and visible symbols. Notably, California is the only state in the union that carries the image of an extinct animal on its state flag and seal.

industry was local up to 1947; the return of the sea otter who loves to eat clams, other natural predators and of course poaching.

- But what brought the Pismo Clam back included efforts to protect them.

Habakkuk says:

How long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?

Destruction and violence are before me.

We missed the cry for help of the California Grizzly, but we heard the cry for help at just the right time for the Pismo Clam. And while Habakkuk's cry for help was to YHWH, as agents of God's will, we, too, should be listening for cries of help of the rest of Creation around us. We should also

...stand at our watchposts, and

keep watch to see what Creation will say to us.

Our readings today are about faithfulness, and they have been for several weeks. Faithfulness comes in many different forms, which is why Jesus uses so many different contexts for His parables. Today, we have faithfulness in times of destruction in Habakkuk and the Psalm. In the secular reading and the Gospel, we have seeds. And to be good Stewards of Creation, we need both faithfulness in times of destruction, and we need the seeds for new growth.

When it comes to Creation Care, we tend to be bombarded by the *big* things: renewable energy, carbon footprint reduction and this behemoth we call the Climate Crisis! But that's not what I want us to reflect on today. I want us to think about doing what keeps us faithful!

I am super excited that the Pismo Clams are making a comeback! And I had nothing to do with it! The survival of species is important to me, especially local species. When I learned that 70% of North America's indigenous flora and fauna

was wiped out through colonization, I was devastated and angry. So, I'm quite chuffed that the Pismo Clams are being restored to their rightful home ... and I had nothing to do with it! I do know Professor of Marine Sciences, Ben Ruttenberg who leads research projects on the Pismo Clams and gave me the information I shared with you. He does a bunch of work on the restoration of the Pismo Clam. And he's doing work related to restoring the abalone population. *His* interest – both professional and personal – in restoring and maintaining marine habitat health, his faithfulness to God's Creation is getting good work done. And while I could contribute in some meaningful way, not having to means that I can work on *my* little corner of Creation where *my* interests, skills and faithfulness lie.

And that's what we each need to do. Yes, every one of us should cut our carbon footprint, and if each of us did, it's possible that we could make a small dent in the Climate Crisis. *AND* if we each threw ourselves into the part of Creation Care that we are passionate about, more of Creation gets cared for!

A couple of weeks ago was the California Coastal Clean-Up day. Thousands of people of all ages went out to clean up the coast, from the Mexican border to the Oregon border. I used to participate with my youth group back in the 1990s. We made a full day of it, with a morning of cleaning up one of the beaches in the Santa Cruz area, then having a picnic lunch and then maybe hitting one or two rides at the Boardwalk. The kids loved their day at the beach, and actually got really excited about picking up trash! That statewide event is now 41 years old because someone is passionate about clean beaches as their faithfulness to Creation.

So, what about Creation are you passionate about? Where do you:

Put your trust in the Lord and do good; and dwell in the land and feed on its riches.

It's that passion and faithfulness that puts the seeds into your pocket. And since each of you has a different pocket full of seeds, that means more of Creation gets some care.

But Fr Ian, you are ignoring this difficult lesson that Jesus told the apostles about being a slave, and coming into the field, and then preparing supper, and doing what is commanded of him. What's that got to do with Creation Care?

The reading from Luke is really tough language! It's difficult not to think that Jesus supports chattel slavery. Jesus doesn't support chattel slavery, even though He speaks about slavery on occasion. But like His references to the innocence of children, the generosity of the poor widow, and the tenacity of the corrupt manager, Jesus is drawing upon the greatest quality of the "least of these". Owning slaves was common in Jesus' context, not part of a culture war. So, using a slave as an example would have been understood by everyone. And by elevating a slave as part of an illustration, it would make a greater impression on Jesus' listeners. So, what Jesus is drawing our attention to is not the plight of the slave, but to the slave's faithfulness and humility. What is required of you is the faithfulness and humility of a good slave, and you are not there yet! They would have been devastated that Jesus didn't believe them to have the faithfulness and humility of a worthless slave.

But what Jesus knew is that the slave wasn't worthless. The faithful and humble slave is the *most valuable* slave. Jesus wants us to have that level of faithfulness and humility:

- *Jesus wants us to come to Him with the innocence of a child [Henry/Bibi].*
- *Jesus wants us to be as generous as the poor widow.*
- *Jesus wants us to be shrewd when we get into a mess and not just rely on some magic intervening deity on a cloud.*

And that's where we can each put our energy into our Stewardship of Creation.

- If you listen to Ben Ruttenberg talk about Marine habitats;
- If you listen to June McIvor talk about wind energy;
- If you listen to Peter Cron talk about the green waste biodigester;

You will know and feel the level of faithfulness and humility that Jesus is illustrating with the slave. You will know and feel the level of faithfulness and humility God wants us to put into our Stewardship of Creation. And you will watch them take handfuls of seeds out of their pockets and spread them everywhere: marine habitat seeds, wind energy seeds, biodigester seeds. It takes all different types of seeds to care for and tend this gift that we have been given to live in and with and among.

And just with those 3 examples of local Stewards, image what we are accomplishing with *all* of our faithfulness, humility and seeds!

I was telling the priest at Los Osos about the Pismo Clams the other day. She told me that her son was surfing at Pismo Beach last week, and he couldn't get out of the water because there were so many clams in the sand! The clams had made one of their surfacing events, and they were in the thousands!

See what we can do when we are faithful to our role as Stewards of Creation? Unfortunately, we can't do anything to bring back the California Grizzly Bear. But with indigenous plants in our gardens, habitats for bees and butterflies, hybrid and electric vehicles, responsible fishing and hunting, eating less meat, reducing plastics, supporting the Nature Conservancy, or whatever it is you are passionate about, a lot can be accomplished by being faithful to God through the one thing that you care deeply about. And remember, just like with our Baptismal Covenant, we are not left alone:

*We have seeds of life and hope in our pockets. Our task is to cast them as far and wide as we can. **The breath of the Spirit will do the rest!***