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SERMON: It Was Very Good – Humankind | Creation Care Series #4

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 1:26-31

By Pastor Dayna Kinkade

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So, God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

The sixth day of creation is the day when God created humans, along with cows, dogs, bears, and assorted creeping things. God creates the animals and with great delight says, "It is good!" Then God creates humankind in verse 26 and all hell breaks loose. The first part of the verse is the basis for our being able to say all people are beloved. We are all created in the image and likeness of God. Here at FCCO, we are explicit in saying that "all means all" and includes all people who identify as LGBTIQ. All are beloved. When we see the other as beloved by God and created in God's image, it makes it more difficult to exploit, demonize, and destroy one another.

The second part of this verse is the problem because the second part of the verse has been interpreted to mean that all creation is at the disposal of humans. The use of the word "dominion" has led some to believe that humans have been given creation to use and exploit. There are those who argue that the abuse and destruction of creation has its genesis in this verse from genesis.

The word "dominion" does not have good connotations. If you look it up you find these synonyms: supremacy, ascendancy, dominance, domination, superiority, hegemony, authority, mastery, control, command, power, sway, and rule to name a few. These words, if you ask me, are what's wrong with us – not a right God has given us.

After humans are created God tells creation that plants and trees will yield seeds for food, no one has to kill or be killed, not even plants. Right here in the first chapter of Genesis we have the peaceable kingdom. What kind of dominion does the peaceable kingdom suggest? God's dominion is love and a desire for peace.

Ultimately, this passage is not about us – it is for us – to help us recognize the God of all creation as a god of love and peace – calling us to be people of love and peace in the image and likeness of God. The world is full of despots and tyrants – but God is not one of them. God is love.

Domination, exploitation, abuse can never be associated with God – because when they are associated with God – all hell breaks loose and the most vulnerable suffer.

About twenty years ago a conversation took place at our dining room table with my step-daughter, Milissa. We now refer to the conversation as the evil banana story. I don't know what prompted the conversation but I believe that I said something like no one is pure, we all participate in evil. Milissa was eating a banana and she said to me, "I suppose you are going to tell me that eating a banana is evil." "Yes," I said. I went on to explain to her how multi-national corporations take over land (sometimes violently) from farmers who are getting by. These multi-national corporations then employ these now landless farmers and do not pay them a living wage. The people who grow and pick our bananas can't even afford to buy bananas – while we eat and waste cheap bananas. Of course, she just rolled her eyes at me. Eight years later she was a college student at TCU and she left a message on our answering machine saying, "I get the banana." She was being introduced to social justice and suddenly the banana story made sense.

It would be funny if it weren't so tragic.

I visited the "Made in a Free World" website last week and I took an online quiz to determine how many slaves have labored to support my lifestyle. The answer is 67.

On this same website, I read some of the startling statistics about human slavery.

- Many Pakistani boys are signed away to bonded labor at the age of 13. The contracts last until they are 30.
- A 2012 report by World Education and Plan Nepal estimated there were around 28,000 child laborers working at an estimated 800 brick kilns in Nepal.
- More than 200,000 children are forced to work in India's carpet belt of Uttar Pradesh.
- Bonded labor is used for much of Southeast Asia's shrimping industry, which supplies more shrimp to the U.S. than any other country. Laborers work up to 20-hour days to peel 40 pounds of shrimp. Those who attempt to escape are under constant threat of violence or sexual assault.
- Every day tens of thousands of Americans buy makeup. Every day tens of thousands of Indian children mine mica, which is the little sparklies in the makeup.
- Rubies are believed to be Burma's second largest export after teak wood, and are commonly mined using forced labor. Mines are controlled by either the government or the army, who oversee workers in terrible conditions for little or no pay.
- Coltan is an effective capacitor found in electronics. A U.S. State Department official was interviewed about Coltan mining in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He pointed to the

reporter's smartphone and said, "The likelihood that one of these was not touched by a slave is pretty low."

- In China, soccer ball manufacturers will work up to 21 hours in a day, for a month straight.

Two things I personally love, coffee and chocolate are tainted by child slavery. Over two million West African children still do the dangerous and physically taxing work of harvesting cocoa. In addition to producing nearly half of the world's cocoa, Ivory Coast is the world's fourth-largest grower of Robusta coffee. Robusta beans are used for espresso and instant coffees. They are also blended with milder Arabica beans to make ground coffees. Often, coffee and cocoa are grown together on the same farm. The tall cacao trees shade the shorter coffee bushes. On some Ivory Coast farms, child slaves harvest coffee beans as well as the cacao pods that yield cocoa beans. Like cocoa beans, coffee beans picked by slaves are mixed with those picked by paid workers. More than 7,000 tons of Ivory Coast coffee arrive in the U.S. each year.¹ The U.S. is the world's largest consumer of both chocolate and coffee.

21 Million people are being abused and exploited by what is called Modern Day Slavery. Modern Day Slavery comes in several forms: Domestic Service, Sex Trafficking, Bonded Labor, Forced Labor, Child Labor, and Forced Marriage. Modern Day Slavery touches many of the products we buy and often happens so far down the supply chain large corporations can deny complicity in slavery.

As consumers of these products we need to be informed and understand how our consumption impacts the lives of children and impoverished people around the globe – as well as the environment. We can demand products that do not exploit labor or harm the environment – and those products exist.

Every third Sunday of the month our youth sell Equal Exchange coffee, chocolate, olive oil, and nuts that were produced by small farmers who were paid a fair price for their products. Farmers who get paid fairly can send their children to school rather than the fields. Entire communities are impacted. By selling these products our youth are learning about slavery and justice.

Yes, these products are more expensive....but what is a child worth?

As consumers, we can look for the Fair Trade label, we can buy Equal Exchange products and other fairly traded goods, we can boycott merchants and manufacturers that build their fortunes on the backs of slaves and exploited labor. We can learn about ethical fashion. We can learn about conflict free gems and minerals. We can use our wealth and purchasing power to say, "no more slavery." We can contact the stores we frequent most and ask them to sell fair trade products – this includes Starbucks and chain restaurants.

When this week's FCCO news comes out I will have a list of websites to help you make wise choices and to measure your slavery footprint.

Now I know today is Mother's Day – and maybe this isn't the Mother's Day sermon you were hoping for – but it is the Mother's Day message that mothers in Thailand and Mali and countless other countries need us to hear. Their children are being robbed of their educations and futures because we want what we want – so someone is making a buck.

¹ <http://innerself.com/content/social/economy/8259-bitter-beans-coffee-child-slaves.html>

It's not good. And it won't be good – until all are beloved, all are equal and granted equal opportunities, and all have enough. May God's dream be our dream. May God's vision be our vision. Until God's kingdom comes. Amen.

A few resources:

Ethical Fashion, a beginner's guide: <http://www.ecouterre.com/ethical-fashion-a-beginners-guide/>

Global Slavery Index: <https://www.globallslaveryindex.org>

Child Labor in Chocolate: <http://fortune.com/big-chocolate-child-labor/>

Equal Exchange: <http://equalexchange.coop/our-partners/interfaith-partners/disciples-christ>

The Dark Side of Chocolate: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Vfbv6hNeng>

Slavery footprint survey: http://slaveryfootprint.org/survey/#where_do_you_live