

“Ongoing Consequences”

It’s hard to believe, but there was a time in this country, where the act of throwing trash out of a car window—an act we call littering—was widely practiced. Not because people were necessarily pro-litter. Littering is not good—most of us believe that. But people did it anyway. Go through a drive-through, eat your burger and fries, drink your drink, put it all back in the bag, and when the coast was clear, throw it out the window. It was as if the concept of actually waiting for a trashcan was completely foreign. And this was proven by the all the trash that lined the sides of many streets and roads in this country. Cans, bottles, cups, wrappers, bags—all kinds of trash just thrown out because that’s what people did. Of course, that’s just what a few people still do, but thankfully it’s a lot less than it used to be.

And it was littering that really got me thinking about today’s topic in week two of our November sermon series we are calling *Stewardship Basics*. If you were here last week you might remember that Pastor Wayne started the series focusing on page 1 of the Bible—the account of creation. Humans, he reminded us, bearing the image of God, are to take care of God’s creation, oversee it, administer all that God has made. God remains the owner, but we are the day-to-day managers—we are the stewards. And if we don’t get the basics right, he told us, we really don’t get how to live as Christians. Then he told us that this week I would be preaching on page 2 of the Bible—the part where a crisis in the relationship between Creator and creature, owner and steward begins. And so that what I’m going to do.

It’s called the fall into sin and hopefully we all know that the ongoing consequences of this first crisis are still going on. I know I do, which is probably why one of the first things that came to mind as I studied our text for today in Genesis, chapter 3, was littering.

Now I know that Adam and Eve didn’t have anything to throw away at first. How could they? There was no waste of any kind. God commanded that when they were hungry, they were to simply grab something to eat from any tree of the garden. They didn’t even have clothes. The last verse of chapter 2 tells us that. “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed,” it says. Everything within that relationship of owner and steward was perfect—the rules were set. God said, “Be the creatures I created you

to be— become one, be fruitful and multiply; eat what you want except from this one tree. Eat from it and you die. But there are so many other trees. Get out there and enjoy what belongs to me.” But that didn't last long did it? Neither did the whole **no** littering thing.

We know the facts. The woman saw that the forbidden tree had some nice fruit. It was pretty; it was nice to look at. And this fruit wouldn't just satisfy hunger; she was told it would open eyes—it would make one wise. **So** without really thinking about the consequences—without realizing just how good and perfect her life as a steward with Adam was, she took some of the fruit and ate it. She also gave some to Adam, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both really were opened because they knew that they were naked. And so the crises began, and with it, so too did the littering.

Because remember the first thing Adam and Eve did after their eyes were opened...they sewed fig leaves together and made clothes for themselves. Now, I can only guess here, but since they had never worn clothes, I'm sure their first attempt at making them was not pretty. They were probably tearing fig leaves like crazy trying to get the whole loincloth thing right, all the while leaving a path of discards in their wake—hence littering God's perfect creation with things that were definitely out of place.

That's what sin does. You see, before, all Adam and Eve were set on was God the Creator's Word. They were made to receive all that was needed for body, soul, and mind from the Word of the Lord. Then the one thing that wasn't given to them to manage— the one thing that was forbidden to them, they took ownership of and ate. And just like that, everything was out of place. They knew they were naked. They felt ashamed. This wasn't the way things were supposed to be. And for the first time, they saw in each other not the image of the Creator, but that of takers. They saw in each other a disturbing limit that was never seen.

And so it is with us. We too are naked and ashamed. We too see ourselves and each other not as ones created in the image of God, but as takers. It's our stuff. We work for it, and choose to do whatever we want with it, even if that means throwing it out the car window! Remember that God said on page 1 we were to have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth— dominion as managers of it all. But by page 2, Adam and Eve redefined the word dominion to mean domination because for the first time they acted as if they owned and controlled God's stuff. And as a result, you and I do exactly the same thing. In many

ways both big and small we see the earth as ours to use and abuse in any way we want.

And it's not just the earth in which we are takers. It's all the stuff we collect in our homes. It's the debt we pile up trying to get all the stuff. It's the idols of financial independence and security we continue to seek to please ourselves rather than the true owner. It's all a mess and I hope we all see how out of place everything is when it comes to stewardship.

But just giving up because it's so messed up is not an option. Because the thing is, God didn't stop owning everything after Adam and Eve's deceit, and he sure didn't stop requiring all people after them to keep managing all that is His. Yes, it's harder now. Work can be a real pain and a struggle. The soil now works against us. The once perfect body now sweats in the heat, freezes in the cold, and breaks down a little bit more each day, no matter what we try to do to stop it. Yes, it's all corrupted, things are not as they are supposed to be, and it's all out of place. But you and me, and all people stained by the dirt of sin, still bear the shadow marks of the image of the Creator. And He hasn't changed what we are to do. We are still the managers.

It's hard. It's a struggle. Life as God's stewards gives us emotional distress, physical pain, and ultimately physical death. And I guess, we just join the crowd out there chanting, "Life is hard and then you die" **or** we can seek to use the gifts that the Lord God entrusts to us, believing and trusting all that we have is His. And as hard as this might seem, in light of the big picture, it really isn't. Because we are people with hope.

You see, in the midst of the ongoing consequences of this first crisis, God made a promise. And this promise is recorded in page 3 of the Bible. In Genesis chapter 3:15 God says, "I will put enmity between you (the serpent) and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will crush your head. Isn't it amazing? From the womb of Eve, who Satan used to try and undue what God had done, would come the one who will undo all the things that we have done. My friends, God continued to give and this is the greatest source of hope that we have. Jesus, the Christ, born from the womb of Mary, crucified on Calvary's cross and who burst forth from the tomb in the Resurrection came to put everything back in place—to make everything right again. And our role until he comes again on that great day to claim us to live with him forever in the restored and renewed perfect creation once again is to do what He has always tasks us to do—manage all that belongs to Him.

You know, I have to admit something as I wrap this up today. When it comes to stewardship, I am not that comfortable telling you what to do. You know what God wants from you. But I am comfortable telling you who you are. Jesus says my blood, my sacrifice, my death for you. Just like everything I have always entrusted to you, says the creator, this too is from me. I guess the question we all have to answer now is “how will we respond?” In the name of Jesus. **Amen.**