

Benevolent Dominion
By Patsy Kuipers, Guest Writer

Today's Treasure

***The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.
Genesis 2:15***

Several years ago, then-seven-year-old grandson Joshua made a derogatory comment about tree huggers. Guessing he was mimicking something he'd heard, I smiled and replied, "Careful there, Joshua! One of your favorite people might be a tree hugger." He looked at me sheepishly as he realized I was referring to myself, his plant-loving Grammie.

Since that light-hearted exchange, we've had many conversations regarding invasive species of plants and insects, the effects of pesticides on pollinators, and our part in caring for God's beautiful creation. Though neither of us is likely to chain ourselves to a tree in an attempt to save it, we both prefer protecting rather than pillaging our earthly home.

In the beginning, God created man in His image, male and female He created them. God blessed Adam and Eve, saying, "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 heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:28)

How amazing that Almighty God, Creator, and Ruler of everything, would allow His creatures to participate in ruling over all He had created. As His representatives, they were to extend the beauty and peace that existed in Eden to the whole earth. Alas, they weren't content with their position. When Satan tempted Eve, she exchanged the desire to glorify God for self-exaltation. Her eyes were opened, just as Satan promised, but her disobedience brought death and dismay, not equality with God.

The keeping of the garden that was to be pleasant work in the presence of God became onerous as God cursed the ground, and thistles and thorns sprang up to impede man's attempt to cultivate crops. I often think of the curse when I struggle to free my azaleas and hydrangeas from the prickly vines that ensnare them or labor to rid my woods of poison ivy.

Relationships also suffered. No longer was there peace between God and man or between husband and wife. It wasn't long before brother turned on brother. Strife

became the norm, as God's rebellious image-bearers were led astray by their deceitful hearts, each doing what was right in their own eyes. Even the creation groaned under the burden of sin (Romans 8:19-23).

Another, more recent, lunchtime conversation with my grandkids found us discussing pets. Since my 19-year-old cat, Willie, died several years ago, I haven't had a pet, so I offered up, "The birds are my outdoor pets."

Six-year-old Emma replied, "Those aren't your birds, Grammie! Those are the world's birds."

"You're right, Emma. They're God's birds, but He lets me feed them."
And so He does.

LIFE-GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT

Despite Adam and Eve's rebellion, God didn't give up on His original design or consign His wayward children to eternal exile. Before He banished them from the garden, God promised there would be a way back, a perfect plan developed before the foundation of the world.

In the fullness of time, Jesus, the only begotten Son, was born, lived a sinless life, and died a brutal death, exchanging His spotless garments of perfect righteousness for our filthy rags of wretched sinfulness.

When it came time for Him to return to His Father, Jesus gave His disciples instructions that hearkened back to those God gave Adam and Eve, "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*" (Matthew 28:18-20)

Too often, when we hear words like authority, dominion, and subdue, we think of harsh force, one side crushing the other and subjecting them to cruel treatment. But that's not the way God deals with His creatures. He provides and cares for them so they might flourish under His watchful eye. As His children who've been given authority to rule in His stead, we're to do the same.

The Apostle Paul tells us we've been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. Jesus' followers are to be fruitful and multiply spiritually. We're to be peacemakers, sharing the Gospel message of how to be reconciled to God and each other.

Thus, God still calls us to extend the peace and beauty of Eden to the world in our homes, gardens, communities, and relationships – a foretaste of heaven. Though we won't be able to do it perfectly until Jesus returns, we are empowered by the Spirit, enabled to bring the sweet aroma of Christ and the light of His love to a world in desperate need of both.

There will come a time when God displays the force we typically associate with dominion. When Jesus returns, it will be as the conquering King, the One Who will abolish all remaining enemies, including death. Everything will be redeemed and made new, yet better than Eden because there will be no place for sin or evil in the new Jerusalem.

Christ is already seated at the Father's right hand, possessing all authority in heaven and on earth. However, at the consummation of all things, He will assume His visible, eternal rule when every knee will bow and every tongue confesses His Lordship. And when He does, we will rule with Him forever. How amazing!

PRAYER

Dear Lord, what a privilege it is to be allowed to rule with You even now though sin continues to influence our thoughts and behavior. Whether we're caring for birds and plants or each other, please help us extend Your grace to all You place in our sphere of influence as we endeavor to be fruitful and multiply, all for Your glory.