



In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
We all know that's how it begins –
the story of creation, the book of Genesis, the whole Bible, in fact.
The very first word in the Hebrew Bible is *Bereshit* (בְּרֵאשִׁית),
which translates to "In the beginning."

But translation isn't a simple thing,
and in recent years I've seen alternative translations suggested.
At the beginning of God creating the heavens and the earth
Or – *When God began to create the heavens and the earth.*
And these make a difference, because in each of these,
the creation is not something completed, but something ongoing.

God began creating by separating the land from the sea,
and putting lights in the sky – sun, moon and stars.
God began creating by filling the land with plants –
tall trees, lush ferns, prickly cactus, moss, and flowers –
flowers of every shape and size and color.



God began creating birds – soaring eagles, singing blackbirds,
hummingbirds that flit from flower to flower,
penguins who fly through water instead of air.
God began creating water creatures, large and small –
goldfish and stingrays and salmon,
dolphins that play and whales that sing.
God began creating animals on land – from field mouse to elephant,
majestic snow leopard to the silly platypus.

God created all these things,
and placed them into ecosystems across earth and sea.
God gave every creature a place and a purpose, and God blessed them, saying,
be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters and skies and land.
And God saw that it was good – that it would continue to flourish and thrive
recreating itself by the power of God's breath and spirit.
God's creation is ongoing.

Then God made humankind in God's image,

male and female and everything in between.
And God gave the humans a particular task,
to have dominion over the earth and all its creatures.



In her sermon, “Being a Creature Means You Eat,” OT scholar Ellen Davis explores what that dominion might look like.

She writes,

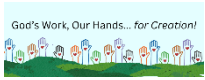
That notion of human dominion is suspect to many ecologically sensitive people, since it has been used as a license to kill, to exercise power in wantonly destructive ways. However, the key Hebrew verb suggests power, yes, but also skill. A better translation might be that we are charged to exercise ‘skilled mastery among the creatures.’

God never wastes a word in Genesis 1. So if God charges humans to exercise skilled mastery, and then with the very same breath says that there is food enough for all, I would guess that those two divine statements are connected in this way: As creatures made in the divine image, humans are meant to exercise mastery by maintaining the food supply for all creatures.

We know that the world is out of balance
because we humans take more than our share.
We take life and wealth at the expense of God’s good creation,
even at the expense of one another.
How different the world might be if humans had understood our role
as caring for the world so that all its creatures – human and non-human –
might have enough to eat?

God creates human beings in God’s own image,
and gives us a place and a purpose.
God shares power with God’s human creatures.
God shares with human creatures the creative process,
the ability to imagine, to invent, to plan, to re-create.
And the ability to destroy, to exploit, to abuse.
Creation is ongoing, and we have a part in it.
What if the image of God we chose to live into was to be like God
who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love?

We are God’s creatures, God’s beloved, made in God’s image.
And we can choose to turn our hand to skilled care of creation –
of plants and animals and seas and earth itself,
and especially of one another.



Today churches across the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are recognizing the day as God's Work, Our Hands Sunday.

We are invited to consider ways we can live into our roles as skilled caregivers,
how we can live out the image of God in our world
by working for the flourishing of all creation.

When we feed someone who is hungry –
collecting food for Sierra Vista,
sending money to ELCA World Hunger,
supporting Roadrunner Food Bank – that is God's work, our hands.

When we collect coats and clothing and Christmas gifts
for children whose families can't provide them
– that is God's work, our hands.

When we make quilts to send overseas and across the border and into the streets
to offer warmth and comfort to refugees and unhoused persons
– that is God's work, our hands.

Another way that we can practice skilled care
and do God's creative, loving work in the world
is to do the work of advocacy – God's work, our voices.

The ELCA has just passed a social statement about the power and importance
of civic responsibility and the work of advocacy
to create a society which is just and compassionate for all.

When we write letters to congress with Bread for the World
– that is God's work with our voices.

When we visit the legislature to speak on behalf of justice
– it is God's work with our voices.

When we march to protest unjust ICE detentions or protest cuts to Medicaid and
SNAP – it is God's work with our voices.

When we hear unkind, racist, homophobic comments and call them out,
reminding our friends and neighbors how hurtful careless words can be
– that too is God's work with our voices

Later this month I will be going to Washington DC
for an event called Gathering at the Gate.

It is a gathering of ELCA pastors and lay people from around the country
to ask that congress support SNAP and Medicaid benefits for people in need.

We will engage in advocacy training with the national ELCA advocacy office,
and visit the offices of our members of congress.

We hope this action will be the first of many actions and trainings to resist

the harm being done to vulnerable people in our country.

I invite you to participate in this month's action by writing letters on paper plates to our members of congress, asking them to support SNAP and Medicaid.

We use empty plates to symbolize the hunger which will be the result of the recent budget bill.

Here in NM, we can thank our senators and representatives for their opposition to the budget bill, and continuing work to defend SNAP and Medicaid.

So I invite you after worship today, while you share coffee and treats in the fellowship hall, to write letters which I will hand deliver to Washington offices.



God's work, our hands. God's work, our voices.

As creatures made in the image of a loving God,
we are called to use our skill and creativity and compassion
for the sake of the world God loves.

And for our own sake, because living such love is what God intends for us.

What if being made in the image of God simply means that we are made for love?

Pastor Emily Harkins wrote a beautiful Facebook post addressing the increasing movement toward criminalizing homelessness, and the debate happening in her own town. She wrote:

I need you to know something: caring for one another is not responsibility or obligation. It is joy. Pure joy.

Truly. The kind of joy that sneaks up on you when you weren't looking for it.

The kind of joy that feels like gift after gift, love after love.

I know this because it is the truth of my own life: getting to love and be loved by my unhoused neighbors, by my community, is one of the greatest joys I've known.

At some point, we have to choose: will we keep following cruelty, or will we dare to follow love?

We don't have to accept the false binary of 'us' and 'them.' We don't have to build walls out of fear. There is another way forward, a way that dares to say: You are not my problem. You are my neighbor.

God's work. Our hands. Our voices.

It is our purpose, our meaning, and can be our great joy,
to share God's love in the world.

Thanks be to God.

Amen