



UnitingWorld Sunday 2025

Sermon Transcript

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Carers and Servants of Our Common Home

Hello and welcome. My name is Reverend Dr. Cliff Bird. It is my joy and privilege to be sharing with you some thoughts on the theme “Carers and Servants of Our Common Home,” which is based on the text Genesis 2:1-15.

The key verse for our reflection today is Genesis 2 verse 15, which says, “And the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it [Heb. *Abad*] and to keep it [Heb. *Shâmar*],” (read from the *Jubilee Bible*). There are three key insights that I would like to highlight, two from the key verse and one from verses 1-14.

The first key insight derives from the Hebrew word *Abad*, which is used in verse 15. This word has been translated into a variety of familiar terms, such as: to dress (JB), to cultivate (NAS), to work (NIV), and to till (NRSVUE). According to Strong’s Lexicon, *Abad* also means to serve, even, to worship, so what I really want to emphasise is that humans are servants, neither masters nor subjugators, of the Earth or Creation as a whole. Unfortunately, our function as servants of the Earth is so often ignored or forgotten in most interpretations of the text.

The second key insight derives from the Hebrew word *Shamar*, which is also used in verse 15. This word has also been translated into various familiar terms, such as: keep it (NRSVUE), take care of it (CEB), and care for it (Complete Jewish Bible). According to Strong’s Lexicon, *Shamar* means to keep, to guard, to watch, and conveys the idea of careful attention and protection.

Putting these two roles together, human beings are servants and carers of Earth and Creation as a whole. In the Genesis 2 story, this combined role of servants and carers is for the garden that is described in the earlier verses of the text, which leads us to the third key insight.

This third key insight derives from verses 1-14. The garden which the man serves and cares for is filled with many life-forms: God (the Creator); God's Spirit that gives life to the man; ground/soil/earth; minerals and precious stones; stream and rivers; animals and birds; every living creature – cattle is named; man (and finally woman). These are named in the text, but we could assume that included in the phrase "every living creature" were multitudes of creatures in the sky, on land, in the streams and rivers and under the ground, and so on. The garden, then and now, is a common home to many life-forms and creatures, and the man and woman were a part of the garden, not masters over it.

So then, our primary role according to the text is to serve and care for the garden, our earth and common home. Critically, this is because our lives are connected with and also dependent upon the constituents in the garden. For example, our breathing is connected with the breathing of the trees on the land and the algae and tiny creatures in the seas and oceans and of the skies. Our lungs are intricately interconnected with the lungs of Earth. By serving and taking good care of and paying due attention to every life in the garden, we are serving the totality of life as well as ensuring our own wellbeing, both for the present and future.

Let us pause and thank God for these lungs of Earth and let us breathe together with Earth. I also ask you: let our breathing transform into tangible actions of service to and caring for Earth.

Take for instance my home church, the United Church in Solomon Islands. Through our Climate Change Desk, the church is working on how we may be able to reclaim community coastal areas that have eroded and washed away due to rising sea levels. This is done through coastal reforestation using the right species of mangrove trees, starting in locations with deep historical-cultural significance. This effort will help reduce coastal erosion and also help with food security because various fish species that spawn in mangrove areas will replenish. This activity is one in which we engage in partnership with UnitingWorld.

In closing, I urge you – Uniting Church in Australia and people of God in Australia and beyond – to carry out our God-given responsibilities as carers and servants of Creation both here in Australia and beyond. Our collective failure to prioritise such important and urgent call for tangible and missional actions is an injustice to Earth and to the millions, even billions, of people who contribute the least to Earth's worsening condition, and who have the least resources to cope!

In the Spirit and Power of Jesus Christ whose resurrection and presence we celebrate, I urge you to take the necessary steps towards actions that are sorely needed now and into the future! Amen.