

Sermon Genesis 1:1-26 and Matthew 6: 25-31

In 2016 I studied Ecotheology, which is the theology or the God stuff that speaks of caring for the ecological systems of this planet, at the Centre of Ministry, as a five-day intensive. I have always been interested in the environment being a nature lover and a keen gardener so listening to the lecturer explain the facts about the devastating consequences of Earth's warming struck me hard. By the end of the second day myself and all my fellow students felt disheartened, disturbed, and depressed about the way we humans have created a crisis that has the potential to wipe out all life on Earth. The lecturer noticing how emotionally fragile we had all become gave us a break from all the gloom and doom and the following day we focused on listening skills, relationship building, prayer and meditation. That day refreshed us and allowed us to face the uncomfortable truth.

Fortunately for all of you I am not going to hit you over the head with all the facts, figures, and scientific predications of what the future may look like if Earth warms above 1.5 degrees. Fortunately for all of you I am not going to use the sermon I had to prepare as an Ecotheology Assessment today either (mainly because it was pretty lame) but also because you do not need to hear all the facts and figures. Since 2016 we have all been witness to extreme climate events right here in our own backyard. (4/1/20, Penrith 48.2 degrees) We have seen flood, fire, and drought like never before, not to mention record-breaking temperatures and rainfall totals. If you have been hiding under a rock all this time or hold a view that differs to the current scientific consensus please keep listening because I am not going to challenge that. I am going to change tack slightly and go back to the beginning. We are going to look at the way all living things are connected by the breath of God by examining the Beginning.

Genesis 1:2

And the earth was a formless and desolate emptiness, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Ruach of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

I hope you have heard God's Spirit translated as Ruach before but if you haven't it is a Hebrew word that means spirit, breath, or wind. To say this word we need to breathe in and out, it mirrors respiration perfectly. (Try it) In Genesis 2:7 we hear that "God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (Ruach); and man became a living soul."

Almost all living things breathe in one way or another, some only at the cellular level, yet this is the common thread of all life and in this way we are intimately connected. Scientists tell us that our home, this planet Earth has just the right amount of oxygen in its atmosphere, with the perfect amount of hydrogen and the exact amount of sunlight to bring about the stuff of life, water, air, and respiration. The chances of this occurring are a quintillion to one, not impossible within the vastness of the universe but freakishly unlikely. It's practically a miracle.

Genesis tells us that this home of ours is a miracle, an act of God through the Word and the Spirit bringing about a good Earth in which God was well pleased.

So what went wrong and what is the solution? Again, let's go back to the beginning. What happens next in the account of creation? Do you remember?

I am not going to go into detail about the whole tree, fruit, snake, Eve, and Adam story today, but we will look at this event known as the Fall in two weeks' time. For today I am going to sum up this fascinating story as human beings deciding they can do without God, in essence the either literal or allegorical humans in Genesis turn away from the One who gave them life in the first place. It's as if Adam and Eve get too big for their boots and instead of seeing themselves as part of Creation, and primarily as its caretakers and good stewards they decide that they will be creations lord and master, and we have been doing that ever since. The ease with which we can dispose of the necessity of God in our lives is staggering and since the enlightenment, the age of science and reason, we seem to have put God away in a box with along with myths and fairy tales. We have dispensed with meaning, mystery, miracles, wonder and awe and replaced it with smartphones, virtual friends, busyness, self-indulgence, concrete boxes, parking lots, cling wrap, plastic bags, and mountains of garbage.

In Western society our need for progress and development, the need to amass more stuff, own more stuff, get places quicker, get more done, and live a life of comfort and convenience all at the same time has created a planet that groans under the weight of supporting our lifestyles; and I say, our lifestyles because we who are in the top ten percent of the world's wealthiest people, living in western nations contribute 90 percent of Earth's sea, land, and air pollution. Our lifestyles and our sense of entitlement and self-interest have had devastating consequences on God's good earth. In turning away from God we seem to have forgotten some fundamental principles, found within the Scriptures we have failed to hear that, all of heaven and earth belong to the Lord, God loves and cares for all of creation, Creation reveals the nature of God, Creation and all created things are inherently good because they are of the Lord and lastly from the gospel of John we hear that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Through Christ all things were made and in him was life, the life that is the light of all mankind.

And therein lies the solution.

Our hope in Christ makes the impossible possible. The impossibility of this planet existing in the first place came about because of Christ who in yet another seemingly impossible reality became flesh, God became one of us; Jesus lived and breathed and became intimately connected with the wonders and terrors of this life, just like us. Although to some it may sound like foolishness our faith in Christ and our willingness to listen to him and obey his teachings has the potential to bring about change for the better, not just within each of us as individuals but within society as a whole.

The story that we celebrate and keep alive, beginning with the story of God's good creation is a story of hope, a story our world desperately needs to hear. The news is bleak, the facts and figures are terrifying, but the good news is this, in Christ God will bring about the reconciliation of all things, person by person, community by community, nation by nation as we come to understand our place within nature and God's place in our lives as our Loving creator.

We spoke last week about not only loving our neighbours but loving our enemies, this week we can expand that to all living things. This impossible calling only becomes possible through the power and grace of God who gifts us not only the ruach, the breath of life, but also the spirit of love, Christ's spirit that comes to dwell within us. Imagine how the world would look if we humans could see not only each other through the eyes of Christ but all of creation. Would there be a manmade ecological crisis if this spiritual transformation took place?

God is love, be loving as God is loving to our Brothers and Sisters in Christ, our annoying next-door neighbour, the one who has hurt us, the one who has a different point of view, to the stray dog, the spider in the bathtub and give praise to God for Brother sun, and Sister Moon, for we are all connected in and through the Word, our brother Jesus Christ, who is and was and is yet to come.

Amen