

## Sermon - celebrating God's creation

Based on the readings: Deuteronomy 8.7-18; Psalm 67; 1 Timothy 6.6-10, 17-19; Mark 4.26-29

### Participating in Creation

- As we celebrate God's wonderful creation today, it is vital that we acknowledge our relationship with what we might call Nature, or the natural world.
- This extends beyond the plant and animal kingdoms, and includes rocks and minerals, clouds and air.
- It goes further to the moon, the planets, the sun, the stars and the billions of galaxies.
- Speaking of which, I read that there are as many galaxies in the cosmos as there are stars in our own Milky Way galaxy.
- The idea of us participating with God in creation is both theological and linguistic:
- In Genesis 2.15 it says that *The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.*
- There is an expectation that we work alongside God in exercising good stewardship of God's creation.
- We also have in the English language the word *procreate*, which means to produce offspring.
- It literally means to 'create forwards', and it effectively acknowledges that, being made in the image of God, we participate in bringing others into creation.
- Furthermore, this concept is extended by referring to things that we make as our own creation.

### The power to get wealth

- Throughout the Bible there is an acknowledgement that God blesses us with and through his creation, and what God has brought into being provides for our needs.
- Nevertheless, we are also reminded in the reading from Deuteronomy not to take God's provision for granted:

*Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth.'  
But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth (Deuteronomy 8.17-18)*

- And in the first letter to Timothy we are also reminded to exercise wise stewardship over the material wealth that we acquire:

*As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life. (1 Timothy 6.17-19)*

- I read of a Christian who made lots of money very easily, and he became concerned about the verse: *'For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil' (1 Timothy 6.10)*
- So he went and spoke to his pastor about this, and asked if he should stop trying to make lots of money.
- The pastor asked him what he was doing with all the money he made, and when she heard the answer, she responded: 'It seems to me that God has given you a talent for being entrepreneurial.
- 'Making money comes easily to you, and you are doing so in a way that is not deceptive or unethical.
- 'Furthermore, you are giving your excess money to charities and the church, so that all kinds of people benefit from the fruits of your talent.
- 'It appears that although you enjoy making money, it is not possessing you - you are able to let it go quite freely.'

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### Knowing the worth

- I am going to return to considering God's creation more directly, and our relationship with it, by reflecting on the Gospel reading.
- It is a short parable to teach us about the kingdom of God.
- A farmer cultivates a field, sows wheat, and when the grain is ripe, he harvests it.
- As with most parables, there are a number of different perspectives for us to reflect on: however, the primary one for us today is the relationship between God's creation - which provides the growth for the wheat to sprout, mature, and produce heads of seed - and the farmer who participates in facilitating that growth and benefits directly from it.
- One of the aspects of this story, and others like it, is that Jesus does not draw our attention to how the farmer values his own contribution.
- We shouldn't expect that to have been necessary.
- After all, the farmer is intimately connected with the whole process.
- He would have ploughed the field by hand, maybe with the help of an ox or donkey.
- He would have sown the seed by hand.
- He might have set up scarecrows, or chased away hungry birds.
- He would have sharpened the blade of his sickle, and cut every stalk, gathering the sheaves of wheat, and taking them to the threshing floor.
- After the physical threshing he would have gathered the grains into bags or jars, and stored it.
- Maybe his wife might have ground some into flour, and baked the bread at home.
- So that when he sat down and ate the bread, he would have given thanks to God for the provision of the land, the seed, and the growth, and his wife might have likewise thanked him for *his* hard work, working alongside God's blessing, and enabling them to thereby benefit with fresh bread.
- Jesus didn't need to focus on how the farmer valued his work.
- It would have been self-evident that the farmer knew the value of what came from his partnership with the Creator in this work.

### A contemporary parable?

- However, I wonder if Jesus would be able to tell this parable in the same way today?
- Maybe he would have to make it longer, and it might end up having a different angle.
- Here is my version, with a more contemporary feel to it.
- I apologise for any technical inaccuracies.
- A man prepares a field for sowing, using herbicides, fertiliser, and a tractor to till the ground.
- He sows the seed, and when it is growing, irrigates it if necessary, and applies pesticides.
- The wheat grows, and he knows how it does so, because he has studied agriculture, and is sure to choose the best hybrid cultivar for his land and for the season.
- When the grain is ripe he sends in the combine harvester, and then transports the grain to the silo, and is paid the market value for the assessed quality of the grain.
- Thereafter the grain is moved by train or truck to a flour mill, where it is ground, and the flour is packed into bags, loaded onto pallets, and again trucked to a supermarket distribution centre.
- After some time, the pallet is put back on a truck, and taken to a supermarket, where a shelf-packer puts the bags of flour on the shelf.
- A cafe owner loads some bags of flour into her shopping trolley, and after paying for them, and drives them to her store-room.
- She gets up early the next day, and bakes some special bread with the flour, and sells most of the loaves.

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- But at the end of the day, there are a couple of loaves left, that she won't be able to sell as they won't be regarded as fresh enough.
- So she dumps them in the bin, and the local council garbage truck takes them off with the other rubbish to the local landfill.

### Economic value only

- Where is the parable here? What does this say about the kingdom of God?
- Or maybe this is a parable about the kingdom of humankind.
- We are familiar with the way that our economy works, and recognise that from a financial point of view, this all works out.
- The farmer makes his money, the truck drivers make their money, the workers at the silo and the distribution centres make their money, the shelf-packers and till operators make their money, the cafe owner makes her money, and the investors in the all the properties, and machines, and businesses gain a return on their financial investments.
- The losses from spilt grain, split flour, wastage of all kinds, and the disposal of perfectly edible loaves of bread are all taken into account, so that no one loses out financially.
- The waste and spoilage doesn't matter - it is of no consequence, because it has no value - from a financial, economic point of view.
- Where is God in this story? How is God's creation celebrated?
- Where are people engaging with God's blessing of creation, and valuing that?

### Celebrating our Creator: 'You are worthy'

- This is not to say that the various people involved in the whole process don't value God's blessing in their part.
- And of course many people *do* comprehend God's provision in the food they eat, and give thanks at every meal, blessing God for that.
- Nevertheless, there are many who only comprehend the earth's resources from an economic perspective, so that what we value as God's blessing, they value only in dollar terms.
- This is why it is so important for faith communities like ours, along with other groups, celebrate God's creation in a way that is beyond the purely dollar value, the economic value.
- The Bible calls us to celebrate not only God's creation, but also God *in* creation.
- Not only to recognise and acknowledge God's fingerprints on all created matter, but to recognise God's Spirit animating all life.
- To celebrate God's creation of us, who are then able to share in God's love of his creation.
- To celebrate the wonders and mysteries of God's creation, and to share that with others.
- To hear God speaking to us through his creation, and giving thanks for that.
- And above all, to praise God, not only for all creation, but to praise God for God's own sake.
- The Psalmist has written:

*Let the peoples praise you, O God: let all the peoples praise you.*

*Then the earth will yield its fruitfulness: and God, our God, will bless us. (Psalm 67. 5-6)*

May we be encouraged to praise our Creator God, and by mindful of how we participate in the creation God blesses us with.