

*Sermon preached by Revd Rachel McDougall*

*St Paul's Canterbury*

*Season of Creation*

*Pentecost 13 OS23 Proper 18C*

*Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2022*

*Listen to the voice of Creation – Choose life - Change and Hope*

One of the things that I love about this time of year is to see the blossom emerging on the trees, new leaves and green shoots.

Even though it is still cold it lifts the spirits just to see them.

The lockdowns we experienced over the past two years did bring a new appreciation of the environment around us.

It changed how we saw things.

I noticed the flowers and appreciated the trees and treasured more the gardens and parks.

It is no wonder that when the astronauts first saw earth from space it was life-changing and awe-inspiring. Suddenly we got to see our jewel of a planet from a different perspective.

Edgar Mitchell, the sixth person to walk on the moon, said that:

“Something happens to you out there. You develop an instant global consciousness, a people orientation, an intense dissatisfaction with the state of the world, and a compulsion to do something about it.”

He later wrote a book about the subject in which he said:

*“The Overview Effect is a message from the universe to humanity. The message is that the Earth, when seen from orbit or the moon,*

*is a whole system where borders and boundaries disappear, and everything is interconnected.”*

As Christians that is something we understand – that God created and continues to create the world and gives us life and that we are interconnected.

The prophets and the psalmists talk often of the God who created the heavens and the earth.

Life is a gift, the created world around us is a gift to be treasured and cared for.

God also gives us the ability to choose how we live.

Jesus’ abrasive message to the crowds around him is really about the ability to choose. His over the top hyperbole is an invitation to change how we see things.

Jesus words about hating Father and mother, wife and children are not exactly a great choice for Father’s day.

I don’t think Jesus means that we are to literally hate our families and indeed elsewhere there is the call to love those whom we live with.

He’s using the words as a way of asking them and us to choose how we live life, to consider who or what is most important in our lives.

It is about what we give allegiance to and to take seriously the choices we are making in life, to reflect on whether all that we learnt from our families is still valuable.

We can choose a good life, mutually nourished by nature or can choose a life that is death dealing.

Choosing life does come at a cost, there are sacrifices that we make to live life fully and well.

Today we begin a month-long celebration of the Season of Creation. This season was first celebrated by the Orthodox church but has quickly spread to the main Christian faith traditions as a time to give thanks for and pray for our beautiful fragile world. As churches we unite to pray and act for the care of our world.

This year we will unite around the theme, “Listen to the Voice of Creation.”

The Psalmist declares, “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God’s handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge...***their voice is not heard***; yet their voice goes out through all the Earth, and their words to the end of the world.” (19: 1-4)

During the Season of Creation, our common prayer and action can help us listen for the voices of those who are silenced. In prayer we lament the individuals, communities, species, and ecosystems who are lost, and those whose livelihoods are threatened by habitat loss and climate change.

In prayer we centre the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.

We listen to those voices and we are called to change how we see things and reflect on what we can each do to be part of caring for creation.

We do this in hope that as we hear the groans of creation we have hope in God who is the one who keeps renewing us and creation.

*Listening to the voices of our co-creatures is like perceiving truth, goodness or beauty through the lives of a human friend and family member. Learning to listen to these voices helps us become aware of the Trinity, in which creation lives, moves and has its being. Jürgen Moltmann calls for “a discernment of the God who is present in creation, who through his Holy Spirit can bring men and women to reconciliation and peace with nature.”*

Today we pray for God’s creation giving thanks for all that we have been given and pray for wisdom to choose well what is best to preserve it.

We live in a time of change and challenge as we make choices to preserve our planet. This is a challenge for our entire world.

It does invite us to consider the importance of caring for our planet and consider the cost of that choice.

To listen to the voice of creation and pay attention to it is the first step in choosing life, in hearing God’s call to protect and preserve the natural world and its creatures.

God continues to invite us to choose life.

Choosing life is also about how we pray.

We can pray by contemplating the environment around us. You might like to pray by pondering part of creation that is around you – to focus on a flower or a tree, the river or the sky and reflect on how God is revealed to you as you notice it.

Perhaps this is what Isaac the Syrian was doing when he wrote:

*What is a merciful heart?*

*A heart aflame for all of creation,*

*for men, birds, beasts, demons, and every created thing;  
the very thought or sight of them  
causes the merciful man's eyes to overflow with tears.*

*St. Isaac the Syrian*

*Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God,  
But only he who sees takes off his shoes...*

*Elizabeth Barrett Browning*

As the prayer for this season goes:

*In this Season of Creation, we pray that you would call to us, as from the burning bush, with the sustaining fire of your Spirit. Breathe upon us. Open our ears and move our hearts. Turn us from our inward gaze. Teach us to contemplate your creation, and listen for the voice of each creature declaring your glory. For "faith comes from hearing."*

*Give us hearts to listen for the good news of your promise to renew the face of the Earth. Enlighten us with the grace to follow the Way of Christ as we learn to walk lightly upon this holy ground. Fill us with the hope to quench the fires of injustice with the light of your healing love that sustains our common home.*

*In the name of the One who came to proclaim good news to all creation, Jesus Christ.*

*Amen.*

*Lectio:*

*Jeremiah 18.1-11*

*Psalms 139.1-5, 12-18*

*Romans 8.19-23*

*Luke 14.25-33*