

EVERYTHING WAS VERY GOOD ...

Genesis 1 [MW19-19]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai & Wellsford, Sunday 13 October 2019

There used to be two things speakers were warned against talking about in public

- two subjects that are guaranteed to divide people and cause heated arguments
- two topics to be avoided at all costs
- and they are ... politics and religion
- today it seems we could add a third: climate change
- those on each side seem very hard line
- and I know there are all sorts of arguments pro and con

I do wish to just acknowledge it is all out there

- and wonder, whatever side of the debate, or sideline people might be on
- that we might agree we are supposed to be looking after this world which is our home, our only home in fact
- and further agree that when we look around
- in many ways we are not doing a particularly good job

So it seems to me very necessary that we have an opportunity, like we do this morning

- when we can pause and acknowledge the wonder of creation and give thanks for all we have surrounding us
- when we can recognise the creatures with whom we share our world
- celebrate our blessings and remind ourselves of our responsibilities

In the account of creation in Genesis chapter 1

- six times it records: "And God saw that it was good"

Creation, the universe, the world, us – you and me

- is/are indeed good
- we and everything else are here
- not because of some random cosmic chance
- we are here because of our God
- our God who made our planet and all living things
- from what had been formless, desolate and dark

And when God had done that, as we have just heard

- "God looked at everything he had made and it was very good"

Can you imagine that?

- the earth fresh and green
- bursting with life, colour, movement
- God sitting back, looking at it all
- smiling

Creation began, as recorded in the book of Genesis

- was continued in the gift of God's only son, Jesus
- and creation continues now

We live on and in an absolutely amazing world

- where some amazing things have happened
and 50 years ago was one of the most amazing of all
- 50 years ago, July 16, 1969
human beings left the earth, to land on the moon

I have just started reading the biography of Neil Armstrong

- the first man on the moon
he was a really amazing guy
- in so many ways the perfect person for this mission
and it really was a mission
- about a month before the launch of Apollo 11, at the request of *Life* magazine
Neil Armstrong, in what is surely one of his most careful pieces of writing
reflected on the meaning of the moon landing
- here are a few lines:

From our position on the earth it is difficult to observe where earth is and where it is going, or what its future course might be. Hopefully by getting a little further away, both in the real sense and in the figurative sense, we'll be able to make some people step back and reconsider their mission in the universe, to think of themselves as a group of people who constitute the crew of a spaceship going through the universe. If you're going to run a spaceship, you've got to be pretty cautious about how you use your resources, how you use your crew, and how you treat your spacecraft ...

... the atmosphere of the earth is a small and valuable resource. We're going to have to learn to conserve it and use it wisely. Down here in the crowd you are aware of the atmosphere and it seems adequate, so you don't worry too much. But from a different vantage point perhaps it is possible to understand more easily why we should be worrying.

Wherever you stand on environmental and climate issues and arguments

- we've got a lot to lose
and so much to be thankful for

I've brought along something a bit different and very, very special

- a beautiful delicate glass ball
decorated with fluffy white clouds
some blue birds and a bright rainbow
- the rainbow, a symbol of God's promise and our hope

This is a gift given to me by my wife on the occasion of my ordination as priest

- unbeknown to her, a friend, Doug St. George
who I had invited to preach at my priesting
was going to share a "parable of creation" concerning a beautiful ball
- for me the ball and the parable will always go together
so it seems only fair that I should pass on the parable:

If the earth were only a few feet in diameter, floating above a field somewhere, people would come from everywhere to marvel at it. People would walk around it, marvelling at its big pools of water, its little pools and the water flowing between the pools. People would marvel at the bumps on it, and the holes in it, and they would marvel at the very thin layer of gas surrounding it and the water suspended in the gas. The people would declare it was sacred because it was the only one, and they would protect it so it would not be hurt.

The ball would be the greatest wonder known, and people would come to pray to it, to be healed, to gain knowledge, to know beauty and to wonder how it could be. People would love it, and defend it with their lives because they would somehow know that their lives, their own roundness, could be nothing without it. If the earth were only a few feet in diameter ...

What a gift!

- if the earth were a small and precious ball
hovering near our sign out there on Molesworth Drive/Port Albert Road
- who wouldn't marvel at it
who wouldn't want to protect it, take care of it

If I had made such a beautiful and precious thing

- I'm not so sure I'd be keen to give it to someone else - and yet God did
God handed creation to us
ourselves part of creation, to work with God
- because of this I know and accept that I have a task and a place in God's creation
and I know that God is still intimately involved with his creation
that God is still creating and inviting me to work with him

There is a special relationship, a wonderful interconnection

- between ourselves, our planet and God
a continuing relationship, an unfolding gift
we experience through Jesus Christ, Son of God and Saviour

In thinking about "creation and us"

- a former Anglican Bishop of Christchurch, David Coles
has an interesting point of view

For too long we have assumed that humankind is the pinnacle of creation and therefore entitled to a position of dominance in the ordering of the world ... The concept of human dominion over nature quickly became an excuse to exploit natural resources for selfish ends without ever considering the long term ecological impact of such things as the destruction of rain forests and the consequential destruction of thousands of species of birds and animals, ...

... I believe that as human beings and as Christians living in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, we share responsibility with God using our knowledge and our gifts to build a better world ...

... As I have begun to explore the connections between incarnation and the integrity of Creation, I am more than ever convinced that the greatest disaster is the separation of the sacred and the secular ... The incarnation of God into this world in the person of Jesus Christ is not only a sign of hope, but a force and motivation to shake us and release us from a life of sin, self-destruction, and exploitation of the planet earth.

The late Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, said that when we meet God, the most important question he will ask is *'Did you enjoy the world I made for you?'*

"Enjoy" I think means taking delight in the variety of natural wonders

- plants, animals, birds, insects, fish, people
sharing the amazing resources the earth is blessed with
- caring for each other and the creatures and environment
as we all live and work together on "spaceship earth"

And a concluding piece from one of my most favourite writers, Max Lucado

Creators relish creating. I'm sure his commands were delightful! "Hippo, you won't walk . . . you'll waddle!" "Hyena, a bark is too plain. Let me show you how to laugh!" "Look raccoon, I've made you a mask!" "Come here, giraffe, let's stretch that neck a bit! And on and on he went. Giving the clouds their puff. Giving the oceans their blue. Giving the trees their sway. Giving the frogs their leap and croak. The mighty wed with the creative, and creation was born. He was mighty. He was creative. And he was love. Even greater than his might and deeper than his creativity was one all-consuming characteristic: Love just love. Flawless love. Passionate love. Vast and pure love. He is love.

As a result, an elephant has a trunk with which to drink. A kitten has a mother from which to nurse. A bird has a nest in which to sleep. The same God who was mighty enough to carve out the canyon is tender enough to put hair on the legs of the Matterhorn Fly to keep it warm. The same force that provides symmetry to the planets guides the baby kangaroo to its mother's pouch before the mother knows it is born.

And because of who he was, he did what he did. He created a paradise. A sinless sanctuary. A haven before fear. A home before there was a human dweller. No time. No death. No hurt. A gift built by God for his ultimate creation.

And when he was through, he knew "it was very good."

[*In the Eye of the Storm* pp.238-9]

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good (Genesis 1:31)