

Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg by Rev. Geoff Read

Sunday 9th September 2018 / Creationtide I:

Bible text: Psalm 104

If I was to ask you to describe the wallpaper in one of the rooms in your house, would you be able to do so – and I don't mean white woodchip

Habituation is the psychological term for why the thing we absolutely, 100% could not do without this year, ends up in the pile for the charity shop next year.

Its why the thing that so got on our nerves when we moved into a house within 3 months we just cease to see.

I live right by the woods in Steinsel. Every day I wake, lift the shutters and see the beauty of the Alzette valley. Shortly after I take our Lab Evie for a 45 minute walk in the woods.

I hear some twittering, the rustle of birds in the undergrowth, see some birds flying, but I never really "see" birds. At least not until yesterday morning.

Yesterday I looked into the eyes of a bird. And the bird looked back. I saw it. And it saw me.

Normally I only get that close to birds whose eyes I can't look into. Chickens in a supermarket.

But yesterday morning at the Schlamwiss bird ringing centre, we got close up to birds caught in nets, then gently disintegrated for ringing. Before release we saw around twenty birds close up, including a kingfisher: one or two could hold and handle before gently freeing their hold for the bird to dart away.

And it was amazing. Yesterday I saw birds in a way I had never seen birds before. And it was awesome.

In some ways nature can simply become the wallpaper of our lives. It's a backdrop we are initially excited by as we go to new places or as it is presented to us in a particularly beautiful light or dramatic moment, but the rest of the time it can blur into the background: habituation

And as we heard a few weeks ago, worldviews shape our actions.

I wonder what might happen to the climate change debate if we were more consciously engaged with nature, aware of not only its beauty but also our interdependence?

What might happen if we consciously saw ourselves and nature through the eyes of faith, see them through the eyes of the Psalmist?

O Lord, you have made so many things.

How wisely you have made them all! The earth is full of your creatures. (Ps 104:24)

Celebrating the creation has always been an important part of the church's worship. But since the 1990s more and more churches have consciously dedicated the month of September to that theme and called it Creationtide: making God in his ongoing work of creation the focus of our worship and liturgy, small groups and learning.

As a part of two or three generations that have done more than any others to damage the delicate ecosystem of our world we have never needed more a conscious remembering of the gift of creation and our call to be good stewards

Let's do that now with the help of Psalm 104

Psalms 103 and 104 both begin and end in the same way, they have very similar language and seem to offer twin calls to remember God's works of salvation (Ps 103) and of creation (Ps 104)

Our psalm is described at the end (v34) as a meditation before God: READ v34

Its not a scientific or historical explanation of the created order, it's a meditation, a remembering, an antidote for habituation

That means the language is poetic and metaphorical, word pictures that evoke and express the "Wow" moment on Saturday morning at Schlamwiss in seeing the beauty and delicacy of birds, but also hearing of their heroic, resilient migration flights over thousands of km

It's also the "Wow" moment of the day before when as we drove through the Eifel Marie-Louise and I had a huge bird of prey swoops and wheel in front of our car trying to pick up roadkill

AS the Psalmist consciously stops and looks at the world around God is described in poetic language as wrapped in light (v2), making the clouds his chariot (v3), setting the earth on its foundations (v5), rebuking the waters of chaos (v7) and setting them behind a boundary (v9)

Our translation doesn't show it but that first stanza (vv1-9) is all in the past tense, reminiscent of the equally poetic book of Genesis, the book of origins not of scientific descriptions: In the beginning God created

Vv10ff shifts to the present tense and speak of God's continued engagement and interaction with His world: He makes springs gush (v10), grass and plants to grow (that gives us food and drink and all we need for our wellbeing), including bread to strengthen the human heart

In C19 as scientific insights and faith wrestled one way of seeing the world that emerged was deism. In many ways it was a then modern take on an ancient worldview, adding a new mechanistic bent as God was seen as the divine watchmaker (Paley, 1802) who had created and wound up this creation, set it in motion before retreating.

Yes, acknowledging the existence of God, but how different from the Judeo-Christian picture of God's ongoing engagement with His creation which finds the highpoint in the Incarnation, as God the Son enters the creation in order to redeem it.

There is a danger that we can come to church, say the creed, we can pray to God and yet have become deists in regard to both the Creator and the created

We have belief and respect for both, but we have lost the connection.

And so for the best of reasons we step in to fill the gap

When in fact as our psalm is clear our part is not first and foremost activity

No, first and foremost is what it says at the opening, the middle and the end of this psalm

Bless the Lord, O my soul. O, Lord my God, you are very great.

O Lord, how manifold are your works! How wisely you have made them all. Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord

As the Westminster catechism puts it: the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

For sure we are called to activity, to stewardship of the created order and the bit he has entrusted to us, but that must be rooted in this most fundamental belief. This is God's world and He is deeply and actively engaged with it.

Creationtide is an invitation to pause and reflect on our engagement with the Creator and His creation.

Weaving it into the annual cycle of the church's year along with Christmas, Holy Week and Easter, Advent and Pentecost means that we have a regular and balanced diet of theology, shaping how we see and think and so shaping how we act out our discipleship day by day

Creationtide offers us a focus with simple practices to draw our eyes, our hearts and minds to look afresh at what might have become the wallpaper of creation and how God the creator's blessings are new every morning

And looking into the eyes of that bird yesterday was, for me, one such practice

Pausing. Seeing. And connecting afresh.

Evelyn has done a brilliant job bringing together ideas and resources to use throughout September that mix together an earthy spirituality ranging from poetry and prayer to being creative in art and bulb planting

Think about trying out the book group or JPIC evening with the head of Greenpeace Luxembourg

And of course, reflecting the generosity of our Creator God by being generous with the gifts you bring to our Harvest Festival that we give on to Fondation de la Porte Ouverte

Welcome to Creationtide 2018

May we embrace the opportunities of this month so we can work deeply inside us the truth of our Bible verse:

Lord, you have made so many things.

How wisely you have made them all.