

Sermon at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev. Geoff Read on Sunday 15th September 2019, Creationtide 2

Text: Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28

Despite the vivid news pictures of the devastation wrought by Hurricane Dorian I find it hard to grasp what it must be like to lose everything

One moment for there to be roof over my head, walls that offer protection and warmth to me, my family, my possessions, my way of life

And then to lose all of that in a few short hours as winds lash and waves rise and all is whipped and washed away

The prophet Jeremiah speaks of loss in similar terms, throwing the process of creation into a sickening reverse gear: READ vv23-26a

For the people of Israel the loss of their homeland in going into Exile was the loss of everything. In Jeremiah, God's judgement is painted as a terrifying picture of the undoing of Creation itself. God reverses the creative work of the beginning of Genesis.

The earth again becomes "waste and void" (v23). The mountains quake and birds and humans have disappeared – the works of civilization, both agricultural and urban, have vanished (v 23-26). Light has gone – and even the heavens grow dark (v28).

Theologically and politically the Babylonian invasion of Judah means the end of the world. This destruction is as a result of human wickedness.

Last week we heard the 5C BC experience of the people of God, their exile to Babylon, is an important metaphor through which to gain understanding of the current ecological crisis: its roots and its implications, both of which lie in Covenant, God's chosen way of relating to humankind and in particular that with Noah, following the flood, of which the rainbow is a sign

The hot wind that blows (v11) is not just one of divine punishment, but the natural playing out of the choices made

Disobedience has practical consequences for us as human beings and also the created world in which we act out that disobedience

One of roots of this disobedience is a misunderstanding of the nature of the authority given by God to human beings over the created order – a misreading of the word "dominion" for what should be "stewardship"

So just as in Genesis, humans and all creatures are formed together (Gen 1:24-31) so in the passage from Jeremiah all suffer from God's judgement.

Humans have a pivotal role with a special calling for the well-being of Creation. When we achieve that, all creation flourishes. But when we fail, all creation suffers.

So this passage shows us two challenges: to work with God's redeeming purposes to save Creation, and at the same time to turn from the 'evil ways' that have incurred God's judgement.

We forget that in the Biblical view, the earth and all that fills it is part of one web of life. A basic error of Western culture is to separate humanity from the rest of creation. The very term: 'the environment' suggests that we are a separate entity, while everything else is 'out there'.

A theology of domination has taught us that nature is something separate to be dominated and controlled. Modern technology separates us from being in touch with nature. It is something to be viewed on a TV or cell phone screen

“The majority of people in the world today seem to have lost touch with the earth from which we were all born. And because we no longer experience ourselves as part of the cosmos, many of us are participating in the destruction of God’s creation. When we lose touch with creation, we lose touch with God.”– Albert Nolan

Until the Middle Ages the Church had a strong theology of creation. Science and faith spoke the same language. Their clear understanding of cosmology was based on Genesis. Genesis taught us that humans were called to love God, to be reconciled to one another and to care for Creation.

The discovery that the Earth moved around the sun came as a bombshell – the dethronement of the earth as central to the universe challenged the theology of creation – and Galileo was condemned as a heretic. Science and religion began to develop on different paths.

The theology of creation was lost and the church focussed on the salvation Christian story – on redemption and salvation. As its understanding of the universe was threatened so the Church moved away from a theology embracing creation to a theology focussing on the Fall and Redemption of humankind.

The split between Church and Science widened with Darwin’s further discoveries. In the case of evolution most of the religious world clung to the Genesis account as a document of both faith and science. Religion was unable to enter into creative dialogue with the new scientific view of the cosmos.

During the age of Enlightenment science was impoverished by the lack of spiritual insights. Science could answer the question ‘how’ but not the question ‘why’. God was seen at best as a ‘clockmaker’ leaving this machine for humans to control. Nature was no longer alive or permeated with spiritual presence, it was objectified and lost any rights. It was seen as simply matter to be manipulated to satisfy human need or greed. The industrial revolution primarily took place in Christian countries where the sense of the spiritual value of creation had been lost.

As the church turned inward and focussed on personal salvation and debates about doctrine, the scientific community developed a parallel salvation story – the power of science and technology to save the world. Some of those dreams have turned into nightmares.

You might say that the Western Christian world-view moved from a theology of wonder to a theology of plunder. Which is where we still are today

So how do we rediscover our theology of creation?

We are going to explore more about this tomorrow evening, but here are three steps that might contribute to that process

Stage 1 is Gratitude

You cannot protect what you do not love. So it is important that we re-connect with nature. The opposite of love is not hate: it is apathy. A- pathy means lack of feeling. Most Christians do not hate the world, but we don’t love it. Love is a verb, an action that starts in really seeing and is expressed in gratitude. And you can only be truly grateful when you have someone to be grateful to – which is where our theology of creation begins, by becoming aware of God as Creator

This afternoon our reflective ramble is an invitation to see – not to take photos, to spot and collect, analyse and record – but simply to see, to allow ourselves to be moved to wonder and gratitude!

The same can be said of how we use of free time: go for an outing into nature instead of the shopping mall. To go for a picnic rather than a restaurant. To teach our grandkids to grow tomatoes. To walk with barefeet on the beach. All move us beyond ourselves and indeed what we are even seeing, beyond to the One from whom all things come

Stage 2 of developing a theology of creation is Lamentation. It's a largely lost practice in the church today – to cry out to God in pain on behalf of another and in the face of pain and injustice

Last week I suggested we start by asking what breaks our hearts in creation today. Lamentation asks what is breaking the hearts of others and in turn God's heart too.

Hear the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth. Read about the impact of climate change on the poorest communities, watch documentaries about the impact of plastic on our oceans. Read about the animals that have already become extinct.

Bring that pain before God in personal prayer or shared confession.

Stage 3 in recovering our theology of creation is to ensure our beliefs always find expression, we take action

It may be a holding action, actions that limit the harm (such as recycling, saving water, reducing use of fuel or electricity)

But let's not stop there. As we do theology, we discover ours is a transforming God, who is about change in individuals, situations and communities alike: start recycling at school or church. Start a fundraiser to buy water tanks for a church in Africa

Our theology should also shape our awareness of the importance of Spiritual practices: so, eg pray in nature. Why don't we have a First Sunday Service in nature. Finding a space where you can see nature when you do your devotions so that we keep our stewardship of the natural an integral part of our spirituality as individuals and as a Church, not an annual bolt-on extra when its Creationtide.

Last but not least, our theology will lead us to realise that ours is a radical God, not content with tinkering around the edges, but committed to Systemic change: this is the action of involvement in campaigning. And in this, it is so humbling to see how young people are leading the way

Theology is not the realm of academics and clergy. It is the gift of Jesus to His whole church – the call to think Christianly and, in so doing, to act likewise