

## **Sermon: Ven Susanna Pain**

**Creation Sunday 13 February 2011**

**READING — John 1:1-5**

On the bench, a glass vase contains a single flower. A banksia, I think, long and slender, pale grey-green, with fine deep green serrated leaves — perfect.

Between the chair lifts amongst the trees at Thredbo a waterfall, secret, unfolds: moss covered rocks in dappled light, greenness, moisture, and water fanning out over rocks, there is deep peace.

Jacque is curled up on my lap head tucked under his paws, sleeping, as I pray.

Reuben, aged four, is excited. Closing the door of his room behind us he shows me his new backpack for preschool and his dinosaur stickers glued to the wall.

Andrew, aged two, arms outstretched, runs reaching up for a hug.

Wonderful creation, interconnected. All our futures bound together.

The reading from Genesis 2:4b-8, 15-17 is part of the second (but probably older) creation story found at the beginning of Genesis. Both proclaim a loving God who created the Earth as an interdependent world of climate, creatures and humans in relationship not only with God but also with each other and with the earth itself.

The Hebrew words translated as ‘man’ = ‘adam’ and ‘ground’ = ‘adamah’ come from the root word ‘dam’ meaning ‘blood’ or ‘red’. Naming the red one formed out of “the dust of the ground” (Genesis 2:7) as Adam identifies his origins and connectedness with the earth, for in the ancient world a person’s name was not simply an identifier but was descriptive of their character.

Another nuance occurs in verse 15 where it says that God “took the earthling and put him in the garden of Eden to work/ till it and take care/ keep it.” In the original Hebrew, these two verbs are technical terms designating specific types of responsibility. The word translated as ‘to work/ till’ in fact means ‘to serve’, used elsewhere in the Bible to describe the relationship between humanity and God; and the verb translated as ‘take care of/ keep’ has a legal sense of ‘guardianship’. So our role is to serve and guard.

We do not own the world, nor yet have freeholder rights but those of caretakers. God has temporarily placed it in our care as trustees for the benefit of future generations. We humans are tenants and stewards, responsible to our Maker for our stewardship. We have to recognise that its resources are finite and hand it on to the next generation in life-sustaining order. Have we been good stewards of creation? Let’s admit it — on our watch we have lived more and more comfortable lives without realizing that our use of carbon fuels was creating global warming... The Aboriginal peoples of our world have the wisdom to understand that the Earth does not belong to us, rather we depend on the Earth. We are custodians. But do we realise it? How can we fail to at this time?

(From Eco-Congregation web site ‘Walking More Lightly’.)

Just as the Hebrew Scriptures started with the beginning of creation so too did the writer of John's gospel though in a very different style and reflecting a major shift in thinking about God. In the 1960's Paul Tillich's book 'Shaking the Foundations' followed a similar vein in shifting theological understanding from God viewed as a being (on a throne in the heavens) to the ground of our being — God as the breath of life, the life-force of the universe, and our ultimate concern. In doing so Tillich brought us back in touch with the apostle Paul's naming of God as the reality "in whom we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Eugene Petersen's translation of John 1:1-5 in 'The Message' reflects this sense of God as the evolutionary thrust inviting us to fullness of life. This passage also implies that Jesus is the "universe come to consciousness".

The Word was first, the Word present to God, God present to the Word.

The Word was God, in readiness for God from day one. Everything was created through him; nothing — not one thing! — came into being without him.

What came into existence was Life, and the Life was Light to live by.

The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness; the darkness couldn't put it out.

Sallie McFague in her book 'A New Climate for Theology' sees the world as "the body of God" — a fascinating idea that makes climate change a major issue for the Christian faith. We live in God as a fish lives in water. Paul Tillich sees religion not as a separate aspect of life, but as the dimension of depth in all of life. Religion all too often becomes one aspect of life among others. It is seen as something "for those so inclined." Nothing could be further from the truth. Religion is about life at its depth. John 10:10 remains for me the central text of scripture. "My concern", says Jesus, "is that you might have life, and have it in all its fullness". God so loved the world! The Christian faith is not about individual salvation. It is about the salvation of the world. It is about individual salvation only in so far as we are part of the world. We desperately need to recognise the cosmological aspect of the Christian faith — God as the restless energy of creative love inviting humanity to a fuller life of peace and unity, the cosmological God at the heart of life, God as the Spirit, the Breath of Life.

(Rev Neville Watson)

God's caring relationship with the whole of creation is the pulse which gives life its fullness. Dorothy McRae McMahan writes:

In the end there is passion:  
deep in the heart of God.

It will not let us go:

It travels with us past the moments of death.

It rises again and again in the eternity of love  
a mystery, a wonder, God undefeated.

(Rev Dorothy McRae McMahan — 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup>C Unity Church minister)

I, the fiery life of divine essence, am aflame beyond the beauty of the meadows,  
I gleam in the waters, and I burn in the sun, moon, and stars ...  
I awaken everything to life.

(Hildegard of Bingen, 12<sup>th</sup>C German abbess)

In I Corinthians 12:12–27, the apostle Paul explains his understanding of the Christian community as the ‘body of Christ’ based on shared values of respect and loving relationship with each other and with God. Perhaps it also forms a starting point for thinking about McFague’s sense of the world being the ‘body of God’.

God has not created a single person whose uniqueness is not eternally needed. Without your unique self the new humanity will be incomplete. This is a staggering truth if you can grasp it. The creation will be forever incomplete without your unique self. This is the Good News — you can become who you really are. I think each of us had best find out what we want to do and start doing it because nothing else is going to help anybody.

(Rev Gordon Cosby — Church of the Saviour, Washington)

Meister Eckhart, 14<sup>th</sup>C German mystic, writes:

God does not ask anything else of you other than for you to let yourself go and let God be God in you.

Creation Sunday poses the questions: how do we see ourselves in relation to God’s creation and Christ consciousness within it? Have we taken the Earth’s ecosystems for granted without acknowledging God’s presence? Do we behave as if the Earth belongs to God? How does this challenge the principles of ownership which have developed in western economics?

Scandinavian poet Moira Rienstra writes:

God is weeping ...  
The creation tapestry that she wove with such joy  
is mutilated, torn into shreds  
its beauty fragmented by force.  
God is weeping ...  
But look!  
She is gathering up the pieces to weave something new.  
She collects  
our shreds of sorrow,  
the rags of hard work, attempts at advocacy,  
initiatives for peace, protests against injustice,  
all the seemly little and weak words and deeds  
offered sacrificially in hope, in faith, in love.  
And look!  
She is weaving them together  
with golden threads of joy  
into a new tapestry,  
a creation richer, more beautiful than the old one~  
God is weaving

patiently, persistently  
with a smile that radiates like a rainbow  
on her tear-streaked face.  
And she invites us  
not only to keep offering her  
the shreds and rags  
of our work and suffering  
but even more —  
to take our place beside her  
at the loom of Jubilee,  
and weave together with her  
the Tapestry of a New Creation.

Louis Armstrong — ‘What a wonderful world ...’

What a wonderful world!

Much of this material comes from the Diocese of Perth Website:  
[http://www.perth.anglican.org/web/Organisations/Anglican\\_Eco-Care\\_Commission/](http://www.perth.anglican.org/web/Organisations/Anglican_Eco-Care_Commission/)

I acknowledge it with gratitude.