

Season of Creation - Earth
10 October 2021
High Street Uniting Church Frankston
David Fotheringham

Read: Genesis 1: 1-25; Romans 1:18-23; John 1: 1-14

Loving God, open our hearts and our senses to recognise your gifting in creation, your love for us in Jesus, and your Spirit of renewal and life. Amen.

Like so many important stories, this one begins by the rivers of Babylon – though versions of it are replicated in many times and places.

By the rivers of Babylon the Israelites, who had been ripped away from their homeland into exile, wept.

They wept, when they remembered their small home, their nation which was like an island in the midst of the maelstrom of the middle east; but the waters of the other nations rose over their figurative island and they were overwhelmed; they became exiles. Not climate exiles, but exiles no less.

And they wondered at the fact that the temple of God had been destroyed. At least, the massive temple of stone that they had made.

By the rivers of Babylon they remembered, they wept, and they walked. Locked down and away from their previous occupations maybe they walked more than they did before; and noticed more, and listened to the land.

And noticed the stars, which were the same as the ones above Jerusalem.

And they remembered, and retold the ancient stories, which included the story of having been sent into exile from an original paradise of Eden.

But there was more. By the rivers of Babylon as they wondered where God was, they remembered the Spirit of God moving on the waters. They remembered the Word of God shaping the land. They remembered, and gathered, and retold the stories of how God's love was not confined to their little Island or to their singular people, but that God created all the land, all the earth, and brought forth all of life.

And God was there with them, by that river; this land, too, was God's land. Through the prophets God told them to do good to that land, to plant gardens, and to seek for good and for peace for the community where they found themselves. For even this land is God's land.

The story of God creating the land is all about teaching us to love and respect all the land,

and to recognise the humble yet significant place that we have in the context of the land, the earth, the world.

The relationship between us and the land is emphasised in the rhythms of creation: in the first three days God creates habitats, and they are good; and in the next three days God creates the inhabitants, and they are good... So on day 1, the light and dark are separated; on day 2, the waters below and the sky above are separated; on day 3, the land is separated from the sea and covered with plants.

Then, on day 4, the light and dark are populated with stars and planets, moon and sun. On day 5, the waters are populated with fish and the sky with birds; On day 6, the land is populated with animals... and then with us. We have our place, a home to respect and to love. And God has... What does God have?

People, in all of their fickleness and all of their wonder; people among whom the very Word of God who shaped the land can take flesh; and a world within which God can take that flesh and grace and truth and love can be shared.

And as John's gospel proclaims, all who recognise that are recipients of the true and eternal life, which in John's gospel is all about knowing God in our place and time through trusting Jesus, the divine made flesh, the one through whom all was created and who has come into the world.

Of course, in the creation story, there's a seventh day, which is a day to appreciate. To appreciate God who does all this and gifts us with the world, with the river, with islands, even the islands which are now being overwhelmed by the rising seas, again, to the worry of our Christian brothers and sisters in the Pacific.

As we appreciate the gift of this earth we cannot ignore the damage that we have unwittingly or wittingly unleashed, nor the impact that greenhouse gases have on the climate, on the lives of those in low-lying, coastal, or fire-prone areas, or farmers where rainfall patterns are being affected, or on the natural wonders of land and sea. This is why the Uniting Church is aiming nationally to become a net-zero carbon emissions church by 2040, through emissions reductions of 5% each year in dialogue with schools, agencies, presbyteries and congregations. At a recent Presbytery meeting a couple of congregations were awarded with "5 Leaf Eco Awards" for various efforts; one of them, Glen Waverley, is already at net-zero emissions.

If the lockdown has meant that we've spent more time in our local natural places, then like the Israelites by the River we might hear the call to tend to garden and the community in which we find ourselves, recalling that all the land is the creation of God, and home to all generations. None of us, alone, can save the world. We ourselves are already saved, in divine grace: we know the love of God who loves us and whose Spirit is among us and

among creation; who takes flesh and shares our mortality and even our death but calls us into fullness of life.

We could ask the question of Paul the apostle: Given that we know that God will save us, shall we not worry then, and continue in destructiveness or ignorance in order to rely the more on God's forgiving grace?

By no means.

Just as we celebrate the world God has made, so shall we advocate for care for the world and all its people.

So shall we be prophetic, sharing the stories of hope for a clean-energy and a just future; so shall we be practical, taking whatever local actions we can to reduce our own emissions; so shall we be pastoral, supporting the work of UnitingWorld in care for the vulnerable Pacific Island communities; and supporting vulnerable rural and regional communities vulnerable to bushfire, drought or employment change.

For in our story we remember what it is like to be in exile; but we also remember that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. On our Sabbath day we appreciate it, and we commit ourselves to care.

To the glory of God.