

Season of Creation - Mountain
31 October 2021
High Street Uniting Church Frankston
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Read: Isaiah 25:6-10; Psalm 46:1-3; Matthew 14:22-23

Guide us, O God, by your word and Holy Spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth find freedom, and in your will discover our peace; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The theme given to us for the last Sunday of this year's Season of Creation is Mountain. What do you call the top of a mountain? *A summit*. And in a strange co-incidence for this very weekend, what do you call a meeting between heads of governments?

When I was in Israel, in the days when you could travel, my friends and I walked along what they called the "Jesus trail", which included going up a mountain on the approach to Lake Galilee. The view was absolutely spectacular. You could see Israel, and Galilee, spread out before you. You could get the big picture and look with awe on the beautiful creation. A wonderful place to pray and listen for God. A place for vision, from God.

Moses went up a mountain to meet with God, and to be given the vision of the community formed around the twin tablets of loving God and respecting (if not loving) neighbour. Elijah went up a mountain, fleeing for his life and seeking for God; and from the mountainside witnessed earthquake, and fire, and storm... only to find that God actually spoke to him in the stillness of the silence, when he could actually listen, and catch the vision of hope. Jesus went up mountains to pray; and as Matthew's gospel portrays it, it is on the mountain that Jesus casts the vision of the life of the kingdom of God. Isaiah, as we have heard today shared the vision of a mountain being a place for all people to come together for the feast of that kingdom. Mountains are places for vision. Summits are places for vision.

On the last Sunday of the Season of Creation it is timely to reflect on our vision for creation. On the eve of the Climate Summit in Glasgow, and with the G20 summit happening as we speak, it is timely to reflect on our vision for creation.

You may or may not have looked up the Australian Government's very recently produced "Plan to deliver net zero, the Australian Way", but it's available on the government's website. Some might find it worth a read. One of the things that I find startling about it is that in the 20 page summary version there is barely a sentence about climate change – nothing about the impact of global warming or of *why* we have a huge interest in limiting the average global temperature rise. There's precious little more in the detailed version, which is perhaps why the plan is content with digging up coal for years to come, to 2050 and beyond, trusting unproven abatement schemes to focus on 'net' zero while still producing plenty of emissions. I find it odd that despite the amount of trading we do on Anzac mythology, "the Australian Way" is now apparently all about avoiding sacrifice.

Meanwhile, back in the mountains...

In the 2020 bushfires, more than 80% of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage listed areas were affected.

Isaiah's mountain vision comes in the midst of a section in Isaiah which is quite apocalyptic in nature. In the previous chapter Isaiah sets the scene of disaster. *The earth will be utterly laid waste..., he says, the world languishes and withers... The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws,... broken the everlasting covenant.* Apt words. Isaiah could be seen to be ahead of his time - and prophetic literature does of course speak into future time, even if Isaiah was writing very much for the people in the time of exile. Exiled people see something of the apocalyptic vision unfolding all around: the earth laid waste, everything bleak and black. In the midst of that, and at the centre of Isaiah's prophetic words, God's vision breaks through.

*On this mountain
the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow,
of well-aged wines strained clear.*

This has beautiful cadences in Hebrew but even in English you get that sense that this is a feast to be savoured. And the vision of this great feast is that it is for *all people*. This is not just for Israel, it is a global hope, a global vision.

And indeed it is an *eschatological* vision, a vision for the ultimate future, when God reconciles and renews all the world and even death is swallowed up, forever, and God wipes away the tears from all faces. This vision is a feast to desire, a hope of celebration together, the aim and goal for all the world.

The *point* of this vision, especially in the face of disaster, is to remind us of the hope God has for the future and to direct us to be working towards it now. That is what mountain visions are all about. That is what summit visions are all about.

I should say, by the way, that I accidentally included a little bit of the next section of Isaiah in the reading – the bit about the Moabites being left on the trash heap. I didn't mean to include that, but as a kind of footnote to the reading it's suggestive of the fact that not everyone does get the vision, and they risk being left behind in the immediate future even if not in the ultimate future.

The vision is that everyone might come together, in reconciliation and hope. This is the hope of God.

This weekend and in the next few days the world leaders go to the summit. *May they pray there!*

May they pause long enough to hear God in stillness, and to catch the vision of all God's people enjoying an earth that is not destroyed.

As they share at feasts that cross cultures and national divisions, may they be startled by God giving them a vision for the world.

May we pray for them to see it, and for it to continue to work in them whether we see the effect of it tomorrow or in surprising ways yet to come.

Because at the summit, like on a mountain-top, you can see the big picture and either be tempted by the devil to lay claim to your own kingdom, or look with awe on the breadth and beauty of creation, and see God's vision of a feast for all.

May that be the vision that guides us, to the glory of God and for the sake of the world.