

Creationtide 2023 Week 1

Exodus 3:1-15, Romans 12:9-21, Matthew 16:21-28

This morning I am going to divide my talk into two.

This week is the first in the annual church season of Creationtide, a season which began in 1999. Each year it runs from 1 September to the first Sunday in October, recognising that 4 October, is St Francis's Day.

Now, thinking formally about creation, as we are doing today, inevitably means that we think of climate change, and particularly so this year with wildfires, floods and drought making the news almost weekly.

So it is no surprise that for Eco-congregations in Scotland, which includes all Scottish Episcopal churches, the theme this year is Justice and Peace.

Amos 5:24 says *But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!* The words are spoken by the LORD God Almighty. And the *But* is there to show what God actually wants in contrast to what he is getting, which is an outward show of meaningless worship. Words without action are meaningless.

Before we look at something of what justice and peace might mean for us in the context of this Season of Creationtide I want to remind us of four things we Christians understand about God's creation.

1. When God finished his creation it was very good.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. Genesis 1:31

This is important. We can beat ourselves up about global warming but God's creation is still very good, isn't it?

2. God gave mankind the responsibility of caring for it.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. Genesis 2:15

This is why we have to take climate change seriously; because God has given us responsibility for his creation.

3. But we must remember: creation still belongs to God.

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.
Psalm 24:1

We may have responsibility but the earth doesn't belong to us. It is God's; we must not abuse it. But because it belongs to God there is hope. He has not abandoned it. Nevertheless:

4. Mankind's failure to live up to the glory of God is distressing creation.

The whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. For creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed when creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. Romans 8:21 & 19

Creation is waiting for we children of God to be the catalyst to free it from its bondage to decay.

So let us remember that we will do justice to creation if we hold in mind these two things:

that what God has created is very good, but it is also groaning.

So remember: it is not all grief; there is joy too. We can, and should, interact with creation with both joy and mourning, holding the two in tension.

Before we look at that in the context of one of our readings today let us stand to sing a hymn reminding us of just how good God's creation is, For the Beauty of the Earth

I have just read you the gospel reading. And it is relevant because it talks about what we focus on in and what actions we take. But what I am going to speak about is earlier reading in Exodus 3 and Moses's encounter with God at the burning bush.

I am going to highlight four things in this encounter.

1. Fire is synonymous with God's glory. Where God is present inherently there is fire, even if we don't see it. Think about Holy Spirit coming on the Day of Pentecost, the tongues of fire on each disciple and the subsequent passion in their mission for Jesus.

2. Moses stands on holy ground. Why was it holy? Because God was present. The awesome holiness of his glory affected the earth below.

It is different for us. We stand on holy ground wherever we go because we carry God's presence within us. And, of course, all the earth belongs to God. He is everywhere. So in one sense it is all holy ground.

3. Moses is to take off his shoes, or sandals. Why is he asked to do this? Taking off one's shoes in a holy place was, and is, a sign of reverence, humility and respect. We need to bear this in mind as we walk daily on holy ground. The writer to the Hebrews wrote (12:28-29) *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire."* Reverence for God includes respectfulness towards his creation.
4. Moses is given the responsibility of acting on God's behalf. God has heard the cry of his suffering people and wants something done about it, not directly by himself but by Moses and others acting on his behalf.

So what does this have to say to us in Creationtide?

- We stand on holy ground in the presence of God
- God hears the cry of his suffering people? Do we?
- God has given us the responsibility for action. Faith without works is dead.

So what can we do in the face of such overwhelming need? After all the UK contributes less than 1% to global warming.

I suggest **ARLIGN** (Sorry about the extra 'R' in align but I couldn't do without it!)

Act Even though we contribute less than 1% there are things we can do and we each know some of them. Most of the 1% is due to fossil fuels. Can we reduce our use at all? And then there is plastic pollution and water pollution.

Research How much do we know about what pollutes our waters and those overseas for example?

How well informed are we as to what we can do practically? Let's find out. For example, and you probably know this, but I have only just discovered that Fairy Liquid contains a water pollutant.

Lobby Is there a cause that the Lord would like you, or I, to take on and lobby politicians, councillors or organisations?

Intercede Pray. Although we have been given responsibility we are in partnership with God. There is only so much practically that we can do but we can pray.

Give Could a little of our money help alleviate the suffering of people? Those affected by drought for example? Food aid, water aid etc.

Notice Notice relevant things that you read or hear in the media. Then, back to the beginning, use it as a basis for research, prayer and maybe action.

It is said that the young people of today are terribly afraid about climate change. They long for action. They seek justice but they have no peace.

We, on the other hand, also seek justice but we can have peace. We worship a God who is in the business of turning mourning into joy. A God who allows creation to groan in the confident knowledge that it will be released some time from bondage to decay. (Romans 8:20-21).

(You know, I had a new thought about those two verses in Romans 8. I have always taken it that creation is waiting for the children of God to be revealed at a future time, the end of the age, and I'm sure that's so. But what if creation is being freed from bondage bit by bit as we Christians enter our destiny and are daily being revealed as children of God through our lives and actions here and now? I leave that with you to ponder.)

Meanwhile let us hold in tension the joy and the groaning of creation, but not as those who have no hope. Instead let's take our hope and turn it into action. Amen

Chris Shaw, 3 September 2023

Take off your Shoes

Take off your shoes
For this is holy ground
God is in this place
Take off your shoes

Take off your shoes and stand
Stand in awe of the fire that burns
In the heart of God
Take off your shoes

Take off your shoes and listen
Listen, as God does, to the cries of suffering people
For food, for water, for home, for justice
Take off your shoes

Take off your shoes and feel
Feel the sorrow that beats
In the heart of God
Take off your shoes

Take off your shoes and hear
Hear the cry of God
“Who will let my Spirit burn in them
To bring justice and righteousness to my world?
Who will take off their shoes?”

Will you?
Will you take off your shoes?
Will you allow the fire of God’s passion
To burn inside of you?
Take off your shoes