

Year A Creation 2 13th September 2026

Exodus 14: 19-31. Romans 14: 1-12. Matthew 18:21-35

I was relieved when I looked at the lectionary readings for this Sunday to see that I don't have to be too imaginative to use them to talk about the season of creation.

With the theme for this year of living water, the reading from Exodus couldn't contain more water than probably any other text except for Jonah!

The formerly enslaved Israelites were being chased across the desert by the army of the Egyptian empire. An empire that had been built on the economics of slavery, and could not conceive of being able to do without slaves. Pharaoh had, in desperation, agreed to release them from bondage. But, he soon changed his mind – possessing and controlling people, as if they were his personal property, that sense of entitlement that is the hallmark of empire, was his life-long habit, and it drove him into changing his mind, perhaps goaded on by others who saw financial ruin for themselves if they did not have slaves.

The equivalence for us today, I believe, is our dependence on fossil fuels. Our industrial and economic might in the 19th and 20th centuries was founded on coal and then oil and gas. Many people cannot conceive of being able to do without gas and oil. Many powerful people and companies whose wealth is invested in gas and oil are sowing doubts into the minds of people, and using their wealth and influence to tell a different story.

In reality drilling for oil and gas off our shores will not make the slightest difference to oil prices as we handed over the operation

such natural resources to private companies; they are not state owned. We have seen the impact on oil and gas prices over the last six months by the totally unnecessary war started by the USA. With rising costs of heating homes and in transporting goods, it is the poorest in our society who will suffer the most from these increased prices.

Using our natural resources of wind, solar and tides has no such ties to major international events, and would provide a more stable pricing structure. It would massively reduce the environmental impact of using fossil fuels, and reduce the costs of energy to those least able to afford to keep warm and well fed. God's bias for the poor is an essential aspect of following the ways of Christ.

Back to the Exodus story...

God in the form of a pillar of cloud, obscured the escaping Israelites movements from their pursuers. However, the Israelites came to a grinding halt at a large body of water. Moses stretches out his hand and the waters part, dry land enables them to cross, but the waters crash back in and thwart the aims of the Egyptian army. The parting of the water enabled the Israelites to escape, and to become a free people, no longer enslaved by empire, no longer subject to economic, cultural, racial, or ecological domination. This is part of what is celebrated at Passover, as a reminder of how to treat the alien in your land. Sadly, we have seen scripture misused for the purposes of empire – where scripture should be used to justify the story of liberation it has been mangled to such an extent that it is used to justify the conquest of the land of others, to claim that land was promised to them by God.

Is this a story that is a warning for us all? In fleeing what we see as tyranny and subjugation, do we often then adopt the same practices

or concepts? As spiritual beings, wishing to be part of God's kingdom on earth, we may have been baptised in the blessed water, but we do not always act as if we have been washed in the Spirit. Sadly, how we have been abused can be reflected in how we treat others, or how those in positions of authority and power can act out their own previous abuses unconsciously or intentionally. As spiritual beings I hope we can be reflective, using the power of the Holy Spirit in our prayer, to explore and examine our own behaviours and what drives them.

The living waters enabled the Israelites to start a new beginning, one of great potential, of being free and able to do God's work. We also reference living waters in our scriptures, and see them as a place of healing, of carrying God's message flowing out from his throne. But, in today's world we are massive polluters of that water. We exploit water to the detriment of the rest of creation, and our oceans are hotter than they have ever been, leading to extinctions, and also further driving climate change. In this village, named after its local river, a connection to living water, what do we wish for it and all who are sustained by it? Can we wish the same for all other water courses, not known to us? Seeing people forced to collect polluted and dirty water for domestic use, or salt water because water levels have risen so high, cannot, I hope be what we would wish on our neighbours across the world.

Our gospel reading is about forgiveness not being reciprocated, and the nature of God's grace and mercy. Mercy is NOT getting what we deserve, whilst grace is receiving God's free gift of love and blessing, even though we really don't deserve it. In this reading the man who was forgiven an impossibly large debt, i.e. received God's generous grace, did not extend that grace to another person who owed him a truly insignificant amount.

Through the lens of Creationtide it is easy to place this parable in today's first world context. We have consumed so much fossil-based fuels over the last 250 years; we have despoiled and contaminated the land, polluted rivers, seas, and the sky. We have caused so much damage to God's creation.

The western world has benefitted greatly, gaining economic wealth, whilst people in other countries have suffered the most, with low wages, rising sea levels, furious storms, displaced fish stocks, soil erosion, intolerable heat, raging fires and damaging floods. The oceans have absorbed so much of the heat generated by the Industrial Revolution, and it is predicted the oceans will create further instability in our weather with stronger and longer el Niño/a effects, with one already apparent this year. Our 'living waters' have absorbed the mistreatment humanity has dealt out to the planet, but the 'living waters' are without blame.

Has our nation, who was at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution and long-term polluter on that basis, have aspects of the unforgiving servant in its character? We have benefitted so much from our knowledge and natural resources – gifts from God – but have we made commensurate acts to those most detrimentally affected? Should we ask for forgiveness, or does it need far more than just words? I suggest that Justice and mercy requires us to join in a dialogue of reconciliation and restoration, to accept our responsibilities for causing a large part of the challenges communities across the world face now, and increasingly so in the future. And to God's creation, we can admit and lament our nation's past as a polluter and desecrator of the ground, but what action are we to then do to help restore the health and wellbeing of the Earth? I think there are three questions to ask:

What can I do?

What can we do?

What should we ask our nation to do at a larger scale than we are able to do ourselves?

Our reading from Romans chapter 14 ends with a searching and reflective question, that is a useful spiritual tool, much along the lines of 'what would Jesus do'. The last line of that reading is,

*'So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.'*

How might you account for your own actions and our collective care of God's creation? May we be open to an honest reflection, and know that it is never too late to make the changes we discern God is hoping we will make.