

The creation as holy ground

4 September 2022 – Season of Creation 1

INTRODUCING TODAY'S READINGS ...

Nature waking up after the cold days of winter. New life all around us.

But there are some things not right with our world ... we need to change some of the ways we are living ...



The story of *the Lorax* by Dr Seuss ...

It's a bit of a sad story because all the beautiful truffala trees were cut down and the animals and birds and fish all left and the place became ugly and deserted. But right at the end the seed gets planted to grow a new tree, which is something we can all do ...

BIBLE READING

Exodus 3:1-6

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that although the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, 'I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up.'

When the Lord saw that Moses had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, 'Moses! Moses!'

And Moses said, 'Here I am.'

'Do not come any closer,' God said. 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.' Then he said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.' At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

Revelation 8:6-12

Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.

The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down on the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water – the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.

The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night.

MESSAGE The creation as holy ground



As we think about creation, we may appreciate its beauty and diversity, or be awed by its size and power.



What we may not appreciate, though, are the stresses and challenges that creation faces that seem to grow with each passing year. We also may not be aware of the solutions to some of these challenges that

are within our grasp if we have the will to act.

During this Season of Creation we will move between these two poles – the problems and the solutions – starting with some of the problems that involve **destruction, degradation** and **death** of natural systems. We need to grasp what is at stake, even if it makes us sad or angry or despairing. Then we'll be in a position to

consider what is **healing** and **healthy** and **hopeful** – and what changes we can make to bring **renewal** to the natural world, God's world.

We start with the **symbol** of this year's Season of Creation, which is the **burning bush** – the story from Exodus where Moses is intrigued by a bush that is on fire but doesn't burn up. His curiosity leads to an encounter with God and a mission to rescue the people of Israel.



*Listen to the
Voice of Creation*
SEASON OF CREATION 2022

Why this symbol? The authors of this year's resources suggest that ... the burning



bush is a sign of all the **unnatural** fires burning in the world – what were called **firestorms** during the black summer bushfires or what Americans call **wildfires** – signs of the effects that climate change is having on the most vulnerable parts of our planet – and caused mainly by human

greed ... and human misuse of the land and oceans that is leading to the breakdown of ecosystems, the destruction of habitats and the loss of life and species at an alarming rate.

Creation is crying out as forests burn, animals flee, and people are forced to migrate. Human greed and injustice are helping to cause these unnatural fires.

But the fire that caught Moses' attention as he tended his sheep flock on Mt Horeb did not consume or destroy the bush. This was a flame of the Spirit that revealed God's life-sustaining presence. This holy fire affirmed that God heard the cries of all who suffered, and promised to be with Moses as he followed faithfully to deliver the people from injustice.



Moses was told to remove his sandals, for he was standing on holy ground in God's presence. This year the Season of Creation calls us to remove the "sandals" of our **unsustainable** lifestyles that disconnect us from creation and from our Creator.

May we contemplate afresh our connection to God's holy ground – the creation – where we live, and may we listen for the various voices of creation calling to us. What are some of the warning signs?

- Fires and floods and cyclones ... becoming more intense ... temperatures rising ... over 40 degC in London, over 50 degC in Canada ... floods in Pakistan have inundated one third of the whole country, more than the area of Victoria
- Glaciers and ice-sheets are melting ... NZ, Europe, Himalayas, Greenland (25 to 80 cm sea level rise) and Antarctica (many metres) ... that would flood many low lying areas of our coastal cities
- The magnificent, glorious Great Barrier Reef is dying more and more each year as the water gets warmer and the corals die ...



The passage from **Revelation 8** ... may seem a strange choice of text for the Season of Creation ... but today's passage speaks of general woes faced by the earth as God attempts to get humanity to listen to God's message. These woes may well be patterned on the plagues God inflicted on Egypt in the book of Exodus,

but the description of a third of the trees and grass burning – has a contemporary feel – bushfires on a grand scale!



Likewise the oceans being poisoned with a third of the sea creatures dying – sounds like humanity's decades long harm to the oceans through pollution – including face masks – warming and over-fishing. And rivers becoming bitter – could describe the Darling River at Menindee with large

numbers of fish dying. And finally a third of the daylight being blotted out – sounds

like what happened during the black summer of fires – as the sun was blackened by bushfire smoke.

God allows all this to happen to gain our attention. These various threats sound like contemporary are warnings from God, **but are we listening?**

Will we change our ways and our unsustainable lifestyles?

At just over **one degree** of warming across the earth we have already seen loss of many animal and plant species ... so I wonder what would **two degrees** of warming look like? Or **three degrees**? It might not sound like much, but if your body runs a temperature two or three degrees higher than the usual 37 you feel really unwell and higher than 42 you probably die.



The fever you run is usually the body fighting an infection.

So if our planet has rising temperatures, what is the **infection** it is fighting? The **symptoms** are clear – increasing levels of CO₂ from burning coal and oil and gas, methane from raising way too many cattle so we can eat beef and dairy products, melting of the polar ice-caps so more heat from the sun is absorbed rather than being reflected ...

But what is the **cause** of these symptoms? ... Very bluntly the cause is mostly **human activity** and **human greed**, wanting more places to live and bigger houses with bigger air conditioners, and more and more electronic goods that we replace every two or three years, and fuel for large SUVs and plane flights.



In some ways we humans are like a **virus** affecting the health of the whole planet ...



... as also suggested in this scene from the 1999 movie *The Matrix* where part of the AI computer program controlling the earth – AI being artificial intelligence – and portrayed by Hugo Weaving as the creepy agent wearing sunglasses – shares his insight about the human race with the human character Morpheus ...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5foZIKuEWQ>

It's not a very comfortable image for humanity to be compared to a virus, but there is some level of truth here.

During the Season of Creation, the symbol of the burning bush calls us to listen to the voice of God but also to the voice of **creation** ...

Listening to the voice of creation ... might mean listening to the voices of climate scientists, ecologists, indigenous peoples, farmers, fishermen ... all the people like the Lorax in our story earlier who speak for nature.



**Listen to the
Voice of Creation**
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But it might also mean listening to the voices of trees, animals, fish, insects ... which is harder ... but take some time and go to a bushland park or along a creek and spend half an hour sitting quietly and just **listen** to the voice of creation.

In **Australia** we are having a debate whether to give indigenous people a voice to Parliament reflected in the Constitution, which seems like a good and overdue step to take.

Meanwhile, in **Chile** in South America, they are about to hold a referendum over a whole new Constitution. If passed, the new Constitution will give **rights to nature** ... so that alongside rights for gender equality, for instance, are provisions to bring legal cases to court **on behalf of natural eco-systems**, bans on the selling or private harvesting of water and the appointment of an ombudsman for nature.

Chile on the Cusp of Recognizing Rights of Nature

If Chileans approve the new constitution in a plebiscite later this year, Chile would be the second country in the world to recognize the rights of nature in a national constitution.

Article 4: Rights of Nature.

Nature has the right to have its existence protected and respected, to regeneration, to the maintenance and restoration of its functions and dynamic balances, which includes natural cycles, ecosystems and biodiversity. The State through its institutions must guarantee and promote the Rights of Nature as determined by the constitution and laws.

—Proposed language for Chile's 2022 Constitution (English translation)



The proposed constitution came from a convention where 50% of the delegates were women and it was led by an indigenous woman named Elisa Loncon. So here is a case where the often ignored voices of the poor, of women and of indigenous peoples were heard and acted upon.

So if we take off our shoes and recognise that we do indeed stand on holy ground – that **all the earth** is holy ground – what message will we hear?

We will hear that the mother nature is labouring and struggling with many challenges – mostly caused by the 8 billion humans that call earth their home.

But there are alternatives to our current destructive and greedy ways of living! There are **changes** we can make in how we live – individually and as a country and as a worldwide population ...

We know what we have to do ... stop burning coal and oil, eat much less animal products like beef and dairy, convert our transport to electric ... but we need to have the collective will to act and be prepared to **pay for the changes** that are needed through higher costs for food and cars and energy, smaller but better designed and better insulated houses, living closer together, stop cutting down forests and plant trees – lots and lots of trees.

As we move through this Season of Creation we'll look more at these alternatives and solutions and hopeful signs, but for today it's enough to try and grasp the seriousness and size of the problems that creation faces – and to remember that we humans do not stand **above** creation but are **a part of creation**, a topic that we'll return to next week.