

Creation speaks

11 September 2022 – Season of Creation 2

INTRODUCING TODAY'S READINGS ...

Listening to the sounds of creation ... bird calls ...

<https://listeningearth.com/play/album/00Welcome.php>

BIBLE READING

[Jeremiah 4:11-12, 23-26](#)

At that time this people and Jerusalem will be told, 'A scorching wind from the barren heights in the desert blows towards my people, but not to winnow or cleanse; a wind too strong for that comes from me. Now I pronounce my judgments against them.' ...

I looked at the earth,
and it was formless and empty;
and at the heavens,
and their light was gone.
I looked at the mountains,
and they were quaking;
all the hills were swaying.
I looked, and there were no people;
every bird in the sky had flown away.
I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert;
all its towns lay in ruins
before the Lord, before his fierce anger.

[Jeremiah 32:1-2, 7-10, 42-44](#)

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord ... when the army of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was confined in the courtyard of the guard in the royal palace of Judah. ...

Hanamel, son of Shallum your uncle, is going to come to you and say, "Buy my field at Anathoth, because as nearest relative it is your right and duty to buy it." ... I knew that this was the word of the Lord; so I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel and weighed out for him seventeen shekels of silver. I signed and sealed the deed, had it witnessed, and weighed out the silver on the scales. ...

This is what the Lord says: just as I have brought all this great calamity on this people, so I will give them all the prosperity I have promised them. Once more fields will be bought in this land of which you say, "It is a desolate waste, without people or animals, for it has been given into the hands of the Babylonians." Fields will again be bought for silver, and deeds will be signed, sealed and witnessed in the villages

around Jerusalem, in the towns of Judah and in the towns of the hill country ... because I will restore their fortunes, declares the Lord.'

[Luke 15:1-7](#)

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering round to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them.'

Then Jesus told them this parable: 'Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep." I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent.'

MESSAGE Creation speaks



We often marvel at the beauty and order of creation. It is indeed 'very good' as the creation hymn in Genesis chapter 1 expresses it.



But what happens when creation threatens to unravel due to the destructive practices of humans which lead directly to rising temperatures and warming oceans? Is it possible for creation to come **undone**, for there to be **uncreation**?



The first reading from Jeremiah 4 is a bit like that. God is about to bring judgment on the nation of Israel through the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. And the destruction that creation experiences seems to mirror the destruction caused by the Babylonian army. So while towns are ravaged and the people are being taken away into exile in Babylon, the land itself is suffering. It is described as **empty** and **formless** – the same word used to describe the cosmos before creation in

Genesis chapter 1.

There is no light and the earth quakes. The fruitful land has turned into a desert. The promised land of Israel, the land described as flowing with milk and honey, has reverted to its pre-creation state. These are word pictures of course but it suggests that there a link between the **physical** and the **spiritual**. In Jeremiah's understanding, Israel is being judged by God for its sin – and the land is suffering as a consequence. It's one more way that all of creation is inter-connected.

I wonder whether a similar scenario is playing out in Australia? Scientists tell us that the degradation in our natural environment – from forests to rivers to the Great Barrier reef – is caused by human activity ... but is there a **spiritual connection** as well? Let's consider two local examples from Victoria, one historical and one more recent ...

During the **gold rushes of the 1850s**, Victoria's population swelled from around 75,000 people to over half a million. Places like Ballarat, Bendigo and Castlemaine became regional cities. Many people got rich while greed and racism against Chinese miners also flourished.



The local indigenous peoples of central Victoria – the Wathaurong and Dja Dja Wurrung nations were decimated, native animals were hunted nearly to extinction, rivers were polluted and the land became barren with barely a tree left standing.

What was the voice of creation saying? Outwardly it was an era of prosperity and progress but attitudes towards indigenous people and the land were not following God's ways of justice and care. Creation was suffering and in need of healing. The scars on the landscape from this era are still evident today.

Another example is the **coal industry in the LaTrobe Valley**. Brown coal was discovered in the late 19th century but considered poor quality for burning as it contains up to 70% water. A coal miners strike in NSW in the 1920s saw the first brown coal power plant built as a stopgap measure.

Eventually four large power plants were built from the 1930s through till the 1990s – great feats of engineering for the time – providing electricity for industry and homes in Victoria. One plant – Hazelwood – closed in 2017 and another – Yallourn – is slated to close by 2028 but the two Loy Yang stations are expected to operate for another 20 years or more.



Charles Popple can explain to you why they need to operate for years to come ... but given what we know about climate change – which is mostly caused by emissions of CO₂ – and the fact that these plants put out **50% more CO₂ emissions** than black coal power plants – which are in themselves big contributors to climate change – we need to shut down these inefficient and high emission brown coal power plants as soon as possible and replace their output with renewable energy from solar, wind and hydro that has zero ongoing CO₂ emissions.

What is the voice of creation saying to us through this example? Perhaps that we need to put the health of the planet ahead of profits and urgently find ways to wean ourselves off our addiction to dirty electricity as soon as possible.

Yet the suffering of the land and the **uncreation** described by Jeremiah is only part of the story. The second reading from later in the book of Jeremiah tells the rather odd story of Jeremiah agreeing to buy a field in the village of Anathoth even as the Babylonian army is surrounding Jerusalem. It seems like an example of **misplaced priorities**. But Jeremiah is convinced that God is speaking through this incident.



God's message is that there is **hope** and a **future** for Israel beyond the current calamity. God has spoken about an exile in Babylon that will last for 70 years, but here speaks about **restoration** and **renewal** for Israel. So the buying of a field is a statement of faith about the future. It is not all doom and gloom.

The middle chapters of the book of Isaiah also speak about the return of the exiles to Jerusalem and again this event is **tied in with creation**. Israel will be forgiven for their sins and the people will rebuild the ruins of Jerusalem.

In response – or to **mirror** this act of salvation – the desert shall **rejoice** and blossom, there will be streams of water in the wilderness, the mountains will sing and the trees of the field will clap their hands. It's the **opposite** of the scene imagined in the first reading from Jeremiah – creation is **renewed** and **joyful!** Again there seems to be a connection between the physical and the spiritual realms.



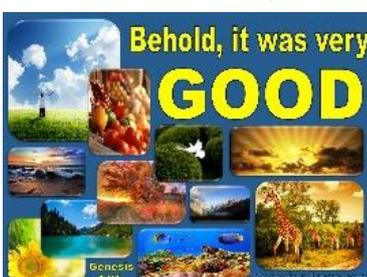
We know that God – through Jesus – is wanting to redeem or restore humanity. We also need to get our heads around the idea that God wants to redeem and restore the **rest of creation**. In Romans chapter 8 we read that creation is in **bondage to decay** and has been **groaning** as in the pains of giving birth.

The redemption and freedom that **creation** seeks is somehow mysteriously connected with the redemption of **humanity** from its spiritual bondage. So again there is this connection between creation and the spiritual state of humanity. The fate and future of both is somehow tied together.

Finally we have the Gospel reading from Luke about the **lost sheep**, the first of three parables about things or people that are **lost** – a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son. In each case, what has been lost is **valuable** and therefore worth looking for. So the shepherd goes searching for the lost sheep and when he finds it, he rejoices and throws a party with his friends to celebrate ... hopefully without lamb on the menu!



God is like the shepherd – rejoicing more over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who don't need to repent. So in the setting of the parable, where the Pharisees are grumbling about Jesus eating with tax collectors, there is more rejoicing in heaven over one **tax collector** who repents than for 99 **Pharisees** who don't need to repent.



This series of parables illustrate the grace of God to seek out and rescue and restore what is lost. If we take this message and apply it to **creation** it suggests that the various elements of creation are valued in God's sight – as God created all of them and pronounced them to be good.

So if one part of creation is 'lost' or suffering, then God will seek to restore it, perhaps through natural means – as creation is fairly resilient if given a fighting chance – or perhaps through human means. And when we act in this way to protect or restore or renew creation, who knows, perhaps there is a party going on in heaven!

If creation does indeed mirror or reflect what we humans are doing, then we need to listen much more carefully to the voices of creation and what they are saying to us – both for good and for ill – and remember that God cares for the whole of creation, not just humanity.