

Listening to indigenous wisdom

18 September 2022 – Season of Creation 3 (50 mins)

INTRODUCING TODAY'S READINGS ... the story of creation

SONG For the beauty of the earth (Rutter)

For the beauty of the earth,
for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies,
over and around us lies.

*Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our joyful hymn of praise*

For the beauty of the hour,
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale and tree and flower,
sun and moon and stars of light,
sun and moon and stars of light.

Refrain

For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth and friends above,
for all gentle thoughts and mild,
for all gentle thoughts and mild.

Refrain

For each perfect gift of thine,
to our race so freely given,
graces human and divine,
flow'rs of earth and buds of heav'n,
flow'rs of earth and buds of heav'n.

Refrain.

Words Folliott Sandford Pierpoint 1835–1917. Music John Rutter © 1980.

BIBLE READING

Genesis 1:1-31 The original creation hymn

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless

and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light 'day', and the darkness he called 'night'. And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day.

God said, 'Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.' ... And it was so. God called the vault 'sky'. And there was evening, and there was morning – the second day.

God said, 'Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.' And it was so. God called the dry ground 'land', and the gathered waters he called 'seas'. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, 'Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.' And it was so. ... And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the third day.

God said, 'Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons, and days and years.' ... And it was so. God made two great lights – the sun to govern the day and the moon to govern the night. He also made the stars. ... And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the fourth day.

God said, 'Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.' ... And God saw that it was good. God blessed the sea creatures and the birds and said, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.' And there was evening, and there was morning – the fifth day.

God said, 'Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, creatures that move along the ground and the wild animals, each according to its kind.' And it was so. ... And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'

So God created humankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.'

Then God said, 'I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food.' And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

[Matthew 6:25-33](#)

I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

'And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

MESSAGE [Listening to indigenous wisdom](#)

When children ask questions such as 'who made everything?' and 'where did we come from?', the Hebrew response of faith is that **God the Creator** made everything – including us – and declared it all to be good. The Hebrew Scriptures of course begin with **two, separate** accounts of creation.

The first account in Genesis chapter 1 is more like a **song** or **poem** with a certain rhythm and pattern as the days of creation unfold. God speaks each day into existence and it is so. The pinnacle of this song is the creation of humanity who are made in the image of God



and whose vocation is to rule over creation.

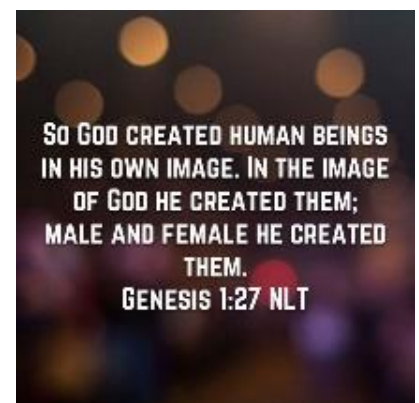
The second account in Genesis chapter 2 is less grand as the first man, Adam, is made from the dust of the earth.

Adam is so named because he is formed from **adamah**, the ground or soil. He becomes a living being only as God breathes life into him. The first woman is then made from the rib of Adam. The vocation of humanity is protect and care for creation while the destiny of humanity in this second account is to return to the dust from which we are taken. Hence the line in the funeral service 'dust to dust'.



Today we will focus on the first account of creation. A common way to read this passage is that God first creates the **spaces** or **boundaries** of creation – heaven and earth, light and darkness, sky and land and seas – and then **fills these spaces with objects** – the sun and moon and stars to fill the heavens, birds and sea creatures to fill the sky and the seas, plants and animals to fill the land.

Then as the pinnacle of creation, God creates **humanity** in God's own image or likeness, male and female they are created. They are to be fruitful and multiply and to rule over the rest of creation. Their food is to be the plants of creation ... and God declares the whole creation to be **very good**.



A literal interpretation of this creation hymn is that humanity has followed God's intentions to a T.

- We have been fruitful and multiplied. There are now **eight billion** of us.
- And we have **ruled over** creation, transforming it to suit our needs.
- We are no longer **vegetarians** as the creation hymn decreed, but rather eat many **animals** and **fish** and have changed the natural environment drastically to provide pasture for these animals and have fished many rivers and oceans to near collapse.
- We also have made places to live – **towns** and **cities** – taking over ever more land – and have developed energy systems to keep us warm and to power our electronic devices and factories. We have been slow to realise that all this '**development**' has caused irreparable damage to creation and we are now reaping the consequences of our actions.

There is another way to read the creation account in Genesis 1, which is that humanity is completely **dependent** on the rest of creation to survive ...

- We need the sun to enable plants to grow
- We need the rain and the rivers to provide water to drink
- We need plants to consume CO₂ out of the air and to provide food for other creatures, including ourselves
- Depending where we live, we need fish and other sea creatures as food
- Again, depending where we live, we need animals to eat and to provide milk and eggs and other parts of our diet.



Most of creation could exist and live quite happily **without humans** and has done for millions of years. But **humans cannot live without the rest of creation** – we are utterly dependent on it ... which makes you wonder why we modern people seem to care so little about how we are damaging and destroying so many parts of creation. Perhaps we are not so clever after all, as the story earlier suggested.

But there are people who live in much closer harmony with the ways of creation ... and that we could learn much from. I'm thinking of **indigenous peoples** both here in Australia and in other parts of the world.



One of the stand-out features of an indigenous culture is to **respect** creation rather than seeking to **control** it. Part of the respect is knowing about which animals or plants can be taken at which time and in which place and in which way – a delicate balance between **knowledge** and **intuition**.

An indigenous saying that you might have heard is that **if you look after country, then country will look after you**. The aim is to care for the land and waterways so they remain productive – not just for people but also for the animals, birds, reptiles, fish and plants that live there. The implication of course is that every part of creation must be allowed to live sustainably. I wonder whether we are we listening to the voice of creation that comes to us through the wisdom of our indigenous brothers

and sisters?

The Gospel reading from Matthew points us in a similar direction. So many people **do worry** about many things – what they will eat and wear, how they will spend their money, where they might go on holidays and so on.

Jesus encourages us instead to look to the example of creation – to the birds and the flowers – that are clothed with beauty and who do not fret about what's cheap at the supermarket, but rather rely on God's provision every day. Jesus assures us that God knows what we **need** and will provide it ... as we pray in the Lord's Prayer ...

... **Give us today our daily bread.**

Jesus does not say, however, that God will provide all we may **want**.

So what might we take away from today's readings? Perhaps to realise how utterly we **depend** on the rest of creation for our existence and therefore the need to **respect** and **care for** creation of which we are simply one part. It's time to change our ways and our habits and learn from indigenous people.

