

Responses to Creation

25 September 2022 – Season of Creation 4

INTRODUCING TODAY'S READINGS

... a poem by Chris Polhill ... suggesting three possible responses to creation

Wow God!

You did well making this planet!

It's beautiful, amazing, awe-inspiring –
from tiny wriggly things to trees and mountains,
and people of all races, extraordinary people.

Sorry for the mess we make!

our whole 'me first' attitude,
that humans are the top of the heap thing,
the violence and destruction,
no feeling for being part
of something much bigger.

Could we find **another way**?

A gentler way.

Could we give stuff up, make changes,
live in a way that heals?

Reminds me now of Jesus
and his inclusive way of love.

MESSAGE IN 3 PARTS

[READING 1 - Select verses from Job 38 and 39](#)

Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?

Tell me, if you understand.

Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!

Who stretched a measuring line across it?

On what were its footings set,

or who laid its cornerstone –

while the morning stars sang together

and all the angels shouted for joy?

Have you ever given orders to the morning,

or shown the dawn its place?

Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea

or walked in the recesses of the deep?

Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth?

Tell me, if you know all this. ...

Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?

Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn? ...

Do you give the horse its strength

or clothe its neck with a flowing mane?

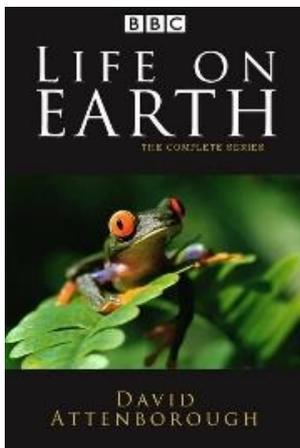
Do you make it leap like a locust,

striking terror with its proud snorting? ...

Does the eagle soar at your command

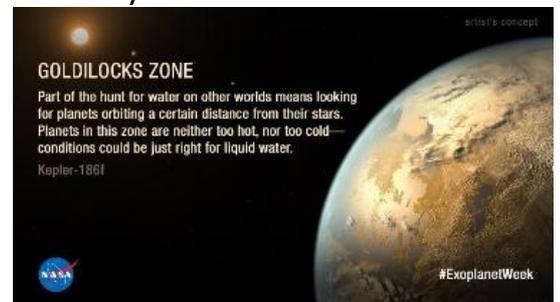
and build its nest on high?

MESSAGE PART 1 – awe, thankfulness and humility



The first response we might make to creation is probably the easiest and most natural to make – that of **awe, thankfulness and humility.**

What we might call the ‘natural world’ is a place of amazing beauty and diversity. The TV programs of David Attenborough have been documenting this raw beauty for decades.



As a science trained person, it doesn't matter whether you think of the **physics of gravity** that keeps our planet in a goldilocks orbit around the sun – not too close to make the earth unbearably hot and not too distant to make it a freezing iceland ... or you think of the **chemistry** of something as fundamental as water that bonds to itself and is so stable ... or the **biology** of living things and how cells reproduce and how enzymes and hormones work. It's all pretty amazing.



Or if you think from an **aesthetic viewpoint**, the world is beautiful with its green forests, blue oceans, golden sunrises and the myriad of creatures that call earth their home. As a photographer I am drawn to this beauty ... here are just a few photos taken from our trip to Tassie earlier this year. ...

Awe, humility and thankfulness are appropriate responses in the face of creation. When God questions Job about how much he really understands about creation and how all this came to be and how it all works together, Job is reduced to silence and awe. Creation is way bigger and yet more intricate and inter-dependent than we can imagine ... and behind it lies the Creator God who made it all.

Perhaps we could resonate with the psalmist who writes in Psalm 8 ...

*When I look at your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established,
what are human beings that you are mindful of them?*

In the whole vastness of the universe, we are small and insignificant, yet we are known and loved by God ... which means that alongside awe and thankfulness and humility, another appropriate response to creation is **worship** ... so the next time you contemplate the flowers and birds and trees around you ... or just the way the human body is put together ... let yourself be drawn into worship ... how majestic indeed is God's name in all the earth!

Interlude – Kathryn sings This is our world

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apv0gM2WRNM>

This is God's world, given on loan;
no other earth shall be our home;
so let us bless, honour and tend
what God in love created.

Words John L. Bell

Second set of READINGS [Isaiah 24:19–20](#)

The earth is utterly broken,
the earth is torn asunder,
the earth is violently shaken.
The earth staggers like a drunkard,
it sways like a hut in the wind;
its transgression lies heavy upon it
and it falls – never to rise again.

Jeremiah 5:23-25

But these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts;
they have turned aside and gone astray.

They do not say to themselves,

“Let us fear the Lord our God,
who gives autumn and spring rains in season,
who assures us of the regular weeks of harvest.”

Your wrongdoings have upset nature’s order;
your sins have kept away her bounty.

MESSAGE PART 2 - Repentance for our greed and indifference

A second response to creation – that is much harder to make for many of us – is to **recognise** and **repent** of our **sin** in how we have **misused** and **abused** creation ... to admit that our way of living – our consumerism and greed and indifference to the rest of creation – has caused massive and perhaps irreparable damage to creation.

We may prefer to think that our insatiable appetite for meat products and electronic goods and large cars and comfortable homes to live in is just normal and typical of our culture. And that is quite true. It is typical of our culture and is **encouraged** every single day by the advertising industry that we **need** big houses and big cars and the latest mobile phone ... or that we somehow **deserve** all these things.



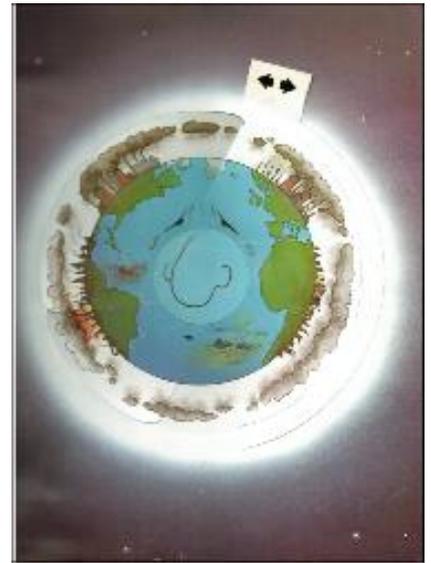
Yet compared to past generations, we live like kings and queens and have become isolated from the farms and mines and factories where all this stuff is grown or produced. We don’t see the CO₂ emissions that our power stations and cars emit every day or the methane emissions that cows and sheep and pigs burp into the air. It’s all just part of our modern life and we don’t usually stop to think about it ...

Likewise we don’t tend to think of the hundreds of species of plants and animals and insects that are becoming extinct because their homes have been destroyed by we humans. Or that the one in a hundred year floods or cyclones or droughts have now become one in every ten year events. The climate of the world is changing, whether we acknowledge it or not.



The simple laws of **physics** and **chemistry** dictate that continuing to burn fossil fuels and keeping too much livestock is inexorably warming our planet and making it steadily more hostile to life. We risk moving out of the goldilocks zone that provides a stable environment for life, including human life.

The readings from Isaiah and Jeremiah suggest that the **earth** is suffering as a result of our human sin and foolishness. This Hebrew way of thinking reflects an understanding that everything and all life is interconnected, so that human sin is experienced and expressed by creation. What is the voice of creation saying to us? ... that the earth is **broken** and the **natural order upset** ... because of human activity and sin. And that's a hard pill to swallow.



But the response of faith to this weight of evidence that lies before us – if we have eyes to see it and ears to hear what climate scientists have been telling us for 50 years – is to **admit** our failure to care for the earth as we should and to **repent** of our greedy consumerist ways. This call applies just as much to me as to any of you ... we are **all** complicit in how we humans treat creation and the effects this is now having on the world and the climate. We need to repent, which means changing our minds.

[Interlude – Kathryn sings This is our world](#)

This is God's world, given on loan;
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what God in love created.

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[Third set of READINGS](#)

[Genesis 2:15](#)

The Lord took the man Adam and put him in the garden of Eden to take care of it and look after it.

[Leviticus 25:3-4, 23](#)

For six years you may sow your fields and prune your vineyards and gather the harvest, but in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbatical rest, a Sabbath to the Lord. ...

No land may be sold outright, because the land is mine, and you come to it as aliens

and tenants of mine.

[MESSAGE PART 3 - Commitment to live sustainably, advocate for change](#)

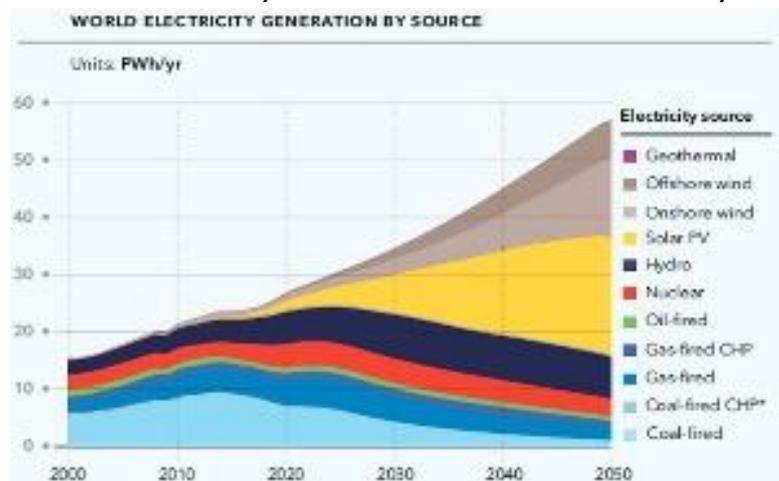
There is a third response to creation that flows out of the second. As we repent and change our thinking, we can also commit ourselves to changing our **actions** in how we interact with the rest of creation.

The second creation account in Genesis chapter 2 states that God created humans and placed them in the garden to **care for it and look after it**.

This is of course very different to the goal of many large fossil fuel companies which is to make as big profits as possible by ignoring the long-term effect of their products on the planet. Their attitude is chillingly familiar to the stance of the tobacco companies a generation ago – deny and deflect any responsibility for harm and make it purely a matter of personal choice.

Is there a way forward that takes our God given vocation to care for the earth seriously? I believe that there is. The **science** is very clear – we have to drastically

reduce our emissions of CO₂ by removing as much fossil fuel as possible from our energy systems and transport, and electrify everything to run on renewable energy. We also need to stop cutting down our forests for grazing land and instead plant lots of new trees and convert marginal farming land back to natural vegetation.



HUMANS ARE
COMMANDED TO
CARE FOR GOD'S
CREATION

Genesis 2:15



As we saw last week, we could learn much from our indigenous brothers and sisters.

One of the features of indigenous cultures – learned over millennia – is how to **live sustainably** on the land ... knowing which plants and animals to take and when and how much ... so that each part of creation is sustained, both through good years and bad years. Indigenous culture of course relied on interacting with native species rather than converting the landscape to farm crops and animals that are



not suited to the particular environment.

It sounds achievable, but requires significant change in how we interact with creation. Yet the reality is that most natural systems are very **resilient** and will **recover** and **renew** if given a fighting chance. Species like fish and birds are prolific breeders if given the right conditions. Even forest communities will recover after bushfires if given enough time before being burned again.



The reading from Leviticus suggests that a sustainable future requires giving the earth a **sabbatical rest** every seven years, based on the pattern of creation when God rested on the seventh day. In practice this might mean deliberately choosing to **reduce** our consumption of energy and food and travel rather than thinking we can carry on at our current levels, unchanged, for ever. The idea of a sabbatical rest is that the earth needs to have a rest to rejuvenate and recover.

Way back in primary school I remember doing a science project on a topic of our choice. To show you that I was a bit of a greenie even back then, my topic was on **pollution**. The conclusion I came to way back then seems as relevant today as it was then ... namely that we could have a clean environment if everyone **wanted** it, **worked** for it and was **willing to pay** for it.

It's the same today. We could move towards a sustainable way of living and a sustainable future if everyone **wants** it, **works** for it and is **willing to pay** for it. We can each make a contribution to this, but it will take more than just you and me making a change in how we live. It will take **collective action** that needs whole communities, governments and nations of the world working together and willing to support each other.



Our earlier poem talked of finding a **gentler, healing, inclusive** way – **the way of Jesus** no less where we truly do love and care for our poor neighbours and do live more simply, being content with what we need. The voice of creation seems to be telling us to stop our mad consumption and our foolish treatment of the planet and learn another way. May we each commit ourselves to follow this gentler path and to advocate for change so that creation may long point us to the beauty and love of its Creator. Amen.