

A call to justice - Season of Creation 1

3 September 2023

PRE-SERVICE VIDEO

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=630595278947911>

BIBLE READINGS

Amos 5:21-24

The Lord says I hate, I despise your religious festivals;

your assemblies are a stench to me.

Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,

I will not accept them.

Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,

I will have no regard for them.

Away with the noise of your songs!

I will not listen to the music of your harps.

But let justice roll on like a river,

righteousness like a never-failing stream!

Matthew 16:21, 24-27

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. ...

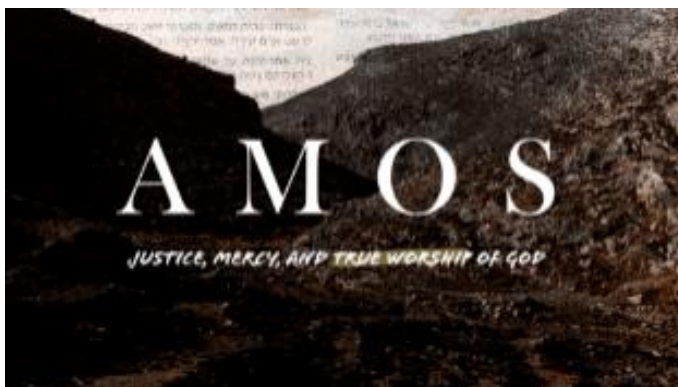
Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.'

MESSAGE

The Season of Creation is an annual invitation to the whole church to spend time reflecting on creation and our part in looking after creation.

Such a topic can raise various emotions in us ranging from awe and wonder to apathy to anger to depression and despair. I hope to explore with you some of what is happening in our world that is really quite bleak, but also to give us hope that we can all make a difference in how we live.

This year's theme is *Let justice and peace flow*, based on a verse from Amos that we heard just now.

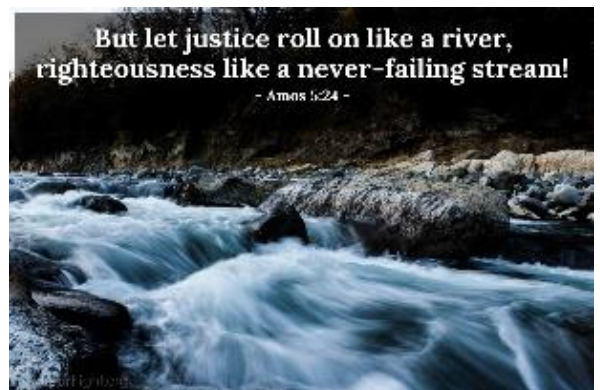


In this prophecy directed to the people of Israel, Amos claims that the wealthy trample the heads of the poor into the dust through their greedy and corrupt practices. They may gather to worship God every Sabbath day, but according to Amos, God despises their empty words

and rituals. Why?

Because they ignore God's ways of justice, truth and right living.

Using the imagery of a river, Amos calls on the people to let justice roll down like a never-failing stream.



**Let Justice
and Peace Flow**
Season of Creation 2023

Hence the symbol for this year's Season of creation is a river. We're invited to join the river – which represents justice and peace – so that hope is created instead of despair.

When I first saw this image something immediately stood out to me. I wonder if you notice it too? One side of the river is a healthy looking blue and the other side is

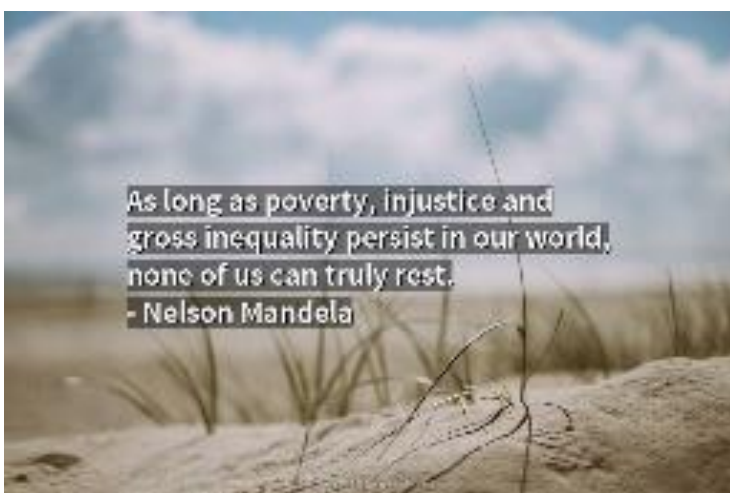
shades of orange and brown. This could be the same river at midday and at sunset. Or perhaps the blue is a healthy river and the brown is a polluted river. Or perhaps the orange side is coloured by bushfire smoke fueled by climate change as we move steadily from cooler temperatures to warmer temperatures.

It suggests to me that we have a choice as to which side of the river we want to follow into the future – one with a healthy planet and justice for the whole of creation or a future that is governed by an increasingly hostile climate.

As we begin our journey through the Season of creation let's spend a few moments contemplating both peace and justice.

Peace or shalom in Hebrew is when everything is right with the world, with our neighbours, with God and within ourselves. So it's a much richer concept than the absence of conflict. We have all that we need in terms of food, shelter, health and purpose in life and can live in security. The wolf can feed alongside the lamb.

This is a vision of heaven, or perhaps a renewed earth.



Justice, or rather a lack of justice, suggests that many things are not right with the world. The distribution of wealth, food, housing and security are not evenly shared.

When climate emergencies happen it is often the poorest of the world who suffer the most whether in

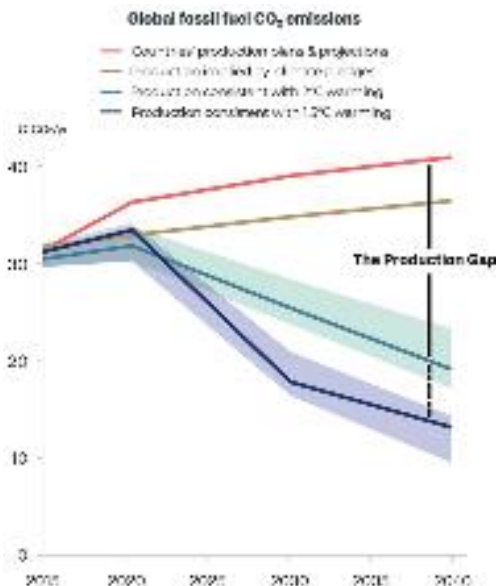
Africa or Asia or the Pacific.

And that is just thinking about human society.

We have seen this year increasingly destructive heatwaves, bushfires and floods and a huge loss of Antarctic sea ice that threatens not just penguins but much of the marine web of life. 2023 so far is the hottest year we have records for.

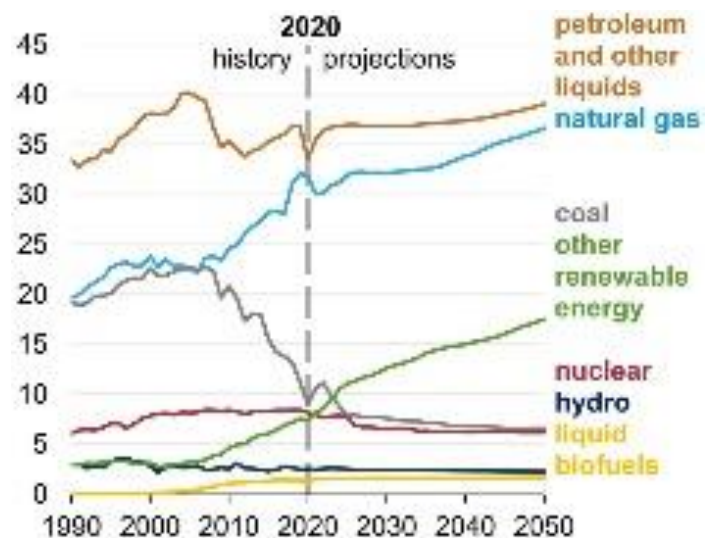


We know what we need to do to turn this around –



scientists have been telling us for decades that we need to drastically reduce our burning of coal, oil and gas and not open any more new coal mines or drill for new gas supplies. And we need to stop cutting down forests like the Amazon for cattle grazing in order to feed our seemingly insatiable appetite for red meat. The bottom two lines on the graph show how quickly we must reduce our use of fossil fuels to remain within 1.5 or 2 degC of warming, while the top two lines show current trend projections into the future.

Like in the prophecy of Amos, large fossil fuel producers seem obsessed with increasing rather than reducing their rates of production and making billions of dollars in profits for as long as they can. I've seen this greed up close from my years of working at Shell and BP – two of the world's largest fossil fuel producers. Again the chart shows future projections of oil and gas usage rising.



You may have seen the latest advertising from the gas industry claiming that gas powers around half of Australia's domestic energy use and – if you believe the spin – is essential for our future well-being. Why do you think they would say that? Would it have

anything to do with record prices for gas and governments like here in Victoria planning to ban gas connections to new homes from next year?

That's the big picture, which can often seem overwhelming and depressing. How do justice and peace fit into a commercial and complicated world driven by profits and competing interests?

The good news is that issues of peace and justice also happen at a local and personal level. And given the image of a river for this year's Season of creation I thought it would be good to think about our local creeks and rivers.

So take Tarralla Creek. This used to be called the Croydon main drain. Much of its length is still an underground drain.

But in the last couple of years, Melbourne Water and Maroondah Council have worked to 'daylight' the initial part of the



creek and make it into a wetlands area with walking tracks, sculptures and habitat for water birds and reptiles. It now provides a beautiful area for people and nature, a place for walking and contemplating and just breathing. Right at our back door. It is a place of peace.



It's a similar story for Dandenong Creek that Tarralla Creek flows into near Bayswater. Much effort has been spent to daylight this creek in the section between the railway line and Parker Reserve in Heathmont. This section of Dandenong Creek has been given new life and again is a peaceful place to

walk or ride a bike or sit and watch the world go by.

While there are still issues with polluted stormwater flowing into Dandenong Creek, it shows how these places can be restored if there is a will.

How about on the justice side of the equation? What can we do here?

Sustainability advocates urge us to refuse, reduce, reuse, repurpose, recycle.

These 5R's are a simple way of reminding us how we can each make a difference. Each step provides us with a way of considering not just how we use a product, but how much waste and energy it will consume over its lifetime.

So, for instance, we could refuse to use any plastic bags when we shop. This may happen soon anyway for those small plastic bags we use to take home our fruit and vegies from the supermarket that are then thrown in the bin.

We could reduce our consumption of fuels like gas and petrol. Liz and I have been pleasantly surprised by the large reduction in our gas use this year having installed a reverse cycle heat pump last year. It heats the main living area and has reduced our winter gas use by about two-thirds, which has also saved us a lot of money. For short local trips we could walk or cycle instead of drive, especially as the weather improves.

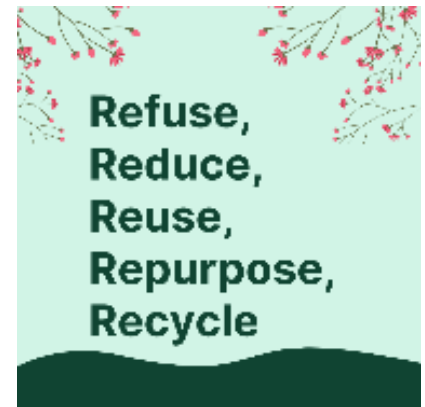
A bugbear for me ... can we reuse or repurpose more things rather than buy new every time something breaks? This is particularly tricky for electronic goods that are designed to wear out and be thrown away after a short period of use. But can old furniture, for instance, be repurposed or reused?

And finally, recycle as much as possible. The new FOGO bin is great for most sorts of food scraps. Soft plastics are tricky but many other types of waste can be recycled if you try, from batteries to steel to paper.

Living sustainably for the planet may well require us to also give something up ... whether it's driving our cars less, eating less red meat, or not buying new clothes until we really need to.

This idea of giving something up ties in with Jesus' upside down way of looking at the world. He calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him. The alternative is to try and gain the whole world and save our own life, the essence of selfishness, which is destined to end in failure and death according to Jesus.

This passage is normally interpreted in terms of our spiritual salvation and



entrusting our soul to Jesus, and being prepared to follow in his footsteps of suffering. But what might it look like from a justice and ecological perspective?

Humanity currently uses way more of the earth's resources than is sustainable, especially our use of fossil fuels. And so we see the planet steadily warming. We are currently sitting at 1.2 degC hotter than the long term average temperature. No big deal we may think.



But already this level of warming is giving rise to more frequent and more intense weather events as we've seen this year. I find it hard to imagine how awful it will become if we heat to 2 or 3 degC above the long term average.

This is why we need to act and act now for the sake of our children and grandchildren and for many threatened species.

Our everyday choices make a difference.

A prayer to finish with before we sing *God, you made your good creation*, a song that we'll sing each week during this season.

Let us pray.

Creator of all,

from your communion of love, life sprang forth like a mighty river and the whole cosmos came into being.

You called human beings to till and keep your garden.

You placed us into right relationship with each creature,
but we have failed to listen to the cries of the earth
and the cries of the most vulnerable people.

We lament the loss of our fellow species and their habitats,
we grieve the loss of human cultures,

along with the lives and livelihoods that have been displaced or perished,
and we ache with the weight of an economy of violence and death that we have
inflicted on ourselves and on the earth.

Open our ears to your creative, reconciling and sustaining word that calls to us
through the Scriptures and through the book of creation.

Bless us once again with your life-giving waters so that your creative Spirit may let

justice and peace flow in our hearts and overflow into all creation.

Open our hearts to receive these living waters and to share them with our suffering brothers and sisters, and all creatures and creation around us.

Bless us as we walk together with all people of good will

so that the many streams of God's justice and peace

may become a mighty river all over the earth.

In the name of the one who came to proclaim good news to all creation,

Jesus Christ. Amen.