

Season of Creation 2

10 September 2023

We will be continuing our journey through the Season of creation. Our liturgy today has a definite Australian edge and comes from various members of Common Grace, a movement for Jesus and for justice, the group who inspired us to knit climate scarves.

INTRODUCING TODAY'S THEME

Water is essential for life. We're advised to drink plenty of water every day, especially when it's hot or when we're exercising vigorously.

The Gospel of John remembers a story about a woman coming to a well in the middle of the day, when it was hot, to draw up water in a bucket.

Jesus was there at the well having a rest.

The woman and Jesus get into a spirited conversation about being thirsty and needing to drink and about the water that we drink.

Halfway through the conversation, Jesus says something fairly enticing.

He said to the woman ... if you keep drinking this water you'll always be thirsty again. But I have another sort of water to give – **living water**.

Drink that and you'll never be thirsty again.

What is this **living water** that Jesus talked about and what's it got to do with letting justice and peace flow in us and through us to others?

Let's listen to our Bible readings ...

BIBLE READINGS

Psalm 85 (responsively)

Restore us again, God our Saviour,
and put away your displeasure towards us.

Will you be angry with us for ever?

Will you prolong your anger through all generations?

Will you not revive us again,
that your people may rejoice in you?

Show us your unfailing love, Lord,

and grant us your salvation.

I will listen to what God the Lord says;
he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants –
but let them not turn to folly.

**Surely his salvation is near those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.**

Love and faithfulness meet together;
righteousness and peace kiss each other.

**Faithfulness springs forth from the earth,
and righteousness looks down from heaven.**

The Lord will indeed give what is good,
and our land will yield its harvest.

**Righteousness goes before him
and prepares the way for his steps.**

John 7:37-39

On the last and greatest day of the Festival of Tabernacles, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

MESSAGE

As we begin this week, it's helpful to remember the inter-connectedness of all life on earth so that what we do and the choices we make affect many other parts of the ecosystem. We may not stop to ponder, but the foods we eat, the clothes we purchase, the amount we drive our car and the way we heat our homes all have impacts on other creatures.

Our first reading this morning from Psalm 85 points to another important truth, namely that God is loving and wants the best for us. Loving faithfulness and righteousness are both attributes of God. They are also vital



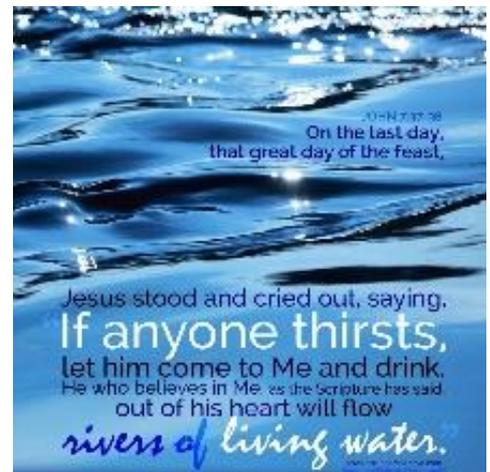


ingredients needed for human flourishing according to the psalm. When people live in a way that reflects the character of God, then God will provide what we need and we will live in peace.

Although the writer takes an Israel-centric view of the world and thus seeks peace and salvation for the people of Israel, these same ingredients are also what is needed for creation as a whole to flourish. When we pursue justice and a fair go for all, when we live rightly with each other and with creation then there will be peace.

The second reading from the Gospel of John speaks about our thirst for this way of living – when we are in right relationship with God and right relationship with our neighbour. The sentiment is actually quite similar to what is described in the psalm.

To satisfy this thirst, Jesus invites people to come to him, to trust in him and to follow his ways and so to be given the gift of God's Spirit, which will flow like a river within people's hearts, a river of living water.



The implication of Jesus' teaching here is that if we want to embrace the full and abundant life that Jesus speaks about throughout John's Gospel, we need God's Spirit working in our lives. As the Spirit fills our lives, we learn more and more about the character of God and the call of God to live rightly and justly and so live in peace. We develop what Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit.

All of this has implications for how we view the rest of creation and whether we seek to dominate creation for our own benefit or seek to care for creation and allow it also to flourish.

Unfortunately, as scientists have highlighted for nearly 50 years, human activity is changing the climate of the world and threatening the life of countless creatures. This is an issue of justice and ultimately also of peace, because if there is no justice there can be no lasting peace.

This is true whether we are thinking of the future



of Ukraine,
the future of Indigenous people in this country
or the future of the Great Barrier Reef.

So although it's a bit depressing we need to remind ourselves of some of the unjust situations that people and other creatures face because of our society's lifestyle choices and our slowness in changing our ways.

Some of these examples may be known to you but others may not be.

Many residents in places like Lismore that were flooded out of their homes on several occasions last year are unable to rebuild their homes and their lives due to lengthy arguments with insurers who say their homes were under-insured due to flood risk.



They will therefore only get back a fraction of the insured value which is not enough to cover rebuilding costs. This is a great injustice as insurers find loopholes in the fine print of their documentation that allows them to not fulfil their obligations. And it ignores the fact that these floods were not like previous floods, but were super-charged by climate change.



Liz and I know of villagers in parts of Vanuatu that have been forced to relocate their village and sometimes abandon the island they have called home for generations because storm tides have flooded their crops and water wells with

salt water.

These super charged cyclones are made much more intense by the historic carbon emissions of wealthy countries – including Australia – which have warmed the atmosphere. Yet the villagers who are suffering – in Vanuatu and other low-lying islands – have hardly contributed to these emissions. Wealthy countries have not committed the funds needed by poorer countries to address the effects of climate change. This is also an instance of injustice.



Just this week we've marked National Threatened Species Day that falls on the date of the death of the last Tasmanian tiger or thylacine back in 1936. The Australian government keeps a list of endangered species – currently numbering over 500 species that includes birds, mammals, reptiles and insects, most of which we are unfamiliar with.

But you may have heard of some on the list including

Leadbeater's possum, a very cute small possum that lives in mountain ash forests east of Melbourne and two parrots – the orange-bellied parrot and the Swift parrot that both breed in Tasmania but then head north to spend winter in Victoria. These and other species are under severe threat due to destruction of their habitat due to logging, housing development, foxes and feral cats.

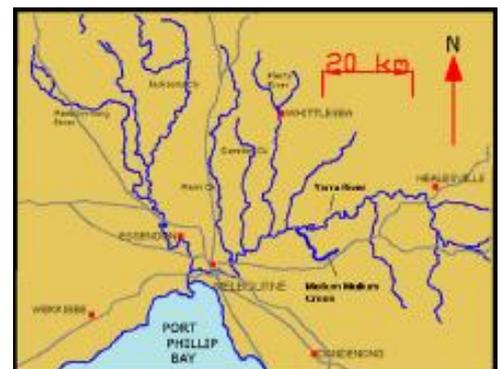


But there are also occasional good news stories. The humpback whale population was reduced to around 300 animals in the late 1970s but a ban on hunting whales has enabled the population to rebound to today's numbers of around 40,000. The humpback was removed from the threatened

species list last year. So sometimes we get things right.

Faithfulness, righteousness, justice and peace is our calling. The question is whether we have the collective will to save such threatened species by making changes to our comfortable lifestyles. There is a connection between the two.

As we saw last week, there are signs of hope and peace if we have eyes to see them. Again I want to talk about one of our local waterways, this time Mullum Mullum Creek, a thin green corridor through the eastern suburbs.



It's one of the only watercourses within metropolitan Melbourne that is surrounded by native and regenerated bushland for almost its entire length – a haven for many



bird species, for possums, butterflies and plants from tall manna gums to delicate orchids in spring. The creek was a significant place for Indigenous people as a food and tool source and as a meeting place.

You can walk the entire 20 km length of Mullum Mullum Creek as Liz and I did last summer from its starting point behind Yarra Valley Grammar in North Croydon to where it joins the Yarra in Templestowe. It's a great place to walk and be at peace. Go and check it out.

Mullum Mullum Creek is also home to platypuses. If anyone is interested in trying to spot one of these elusive creatures, ACF – the Australian Conservation Foundation – is running a platypus spotting evening next Saturday 16 September from 4.30 to 6.30 pm beginning in East Doncaster.

The ACF is holding a platypus spotting evening at Mullum Mullum Creek - where you can see them from the water's edge. It's a great opportunity to see one of the world's most elusive mammals. You can see the full details of the event at www.acf.org.au.

Mullum Mullum Creek Platypus Spotting Evening
Where: Mullum Mullum Creek, East Doncaster
When: Saturday 16 September, 4.30pm - 6.30pm
Organised by: ACF, in partnership with the local community.

LET'S SPOT PLATYPUS



It may well have been the presence of platypuses – along with its natural beauty – that persuaded the State Government to insist on two tunnels being built under the Mullum Mullum valley when the Eastlink tollway was being designed.

It cost up to a billion dollars to construct the tunnels, which begs the question, how much are we prepared to spend or to give up to retain the natural environment? Why was Mullum Mullum creek singled out for protection and restoration and not other worthy places in Melbourne?

How do we choose? The future of so many species is in our hands to determine.

Faithfulness, righteousness, justice and peace for all of creation. This is our calling and our challenge.

