

# Responding with love

22 September 2024

## INTRODUCING TODAY'S THEME

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.



### What in creation makes you go Wow!?



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.

### What makes you angry about humanity's lack of care for creation?

Could we find another way?

A gentler way.

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

Reminds us now of Jesus

and his inclusive way of love.



We want to focus this morning on the third part, following the way of love, and what this might look like as we consider the climate crisis facing the world.

**SONG** This is God's world (sing three times)

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.

John L. Bell © WPG The Iona Community.

## BIBLE READINGS

Your word, O Lord, is a lamp for our feet,  
**and a light to our path.**

Micah 6:6-8

With what shall I come before the Lord  
and bow down before the exalted God?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousand rivers of oil?  
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?  
He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.  
And what does the Lord require of you?  
To act justly and to love kindness  
and to walk humbly with your God.

Romans 13:8-10

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not covet,' and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.

Lord, may your word live in us  
**and bear much fruit to your glory.**

## MESSAGE Responding with love

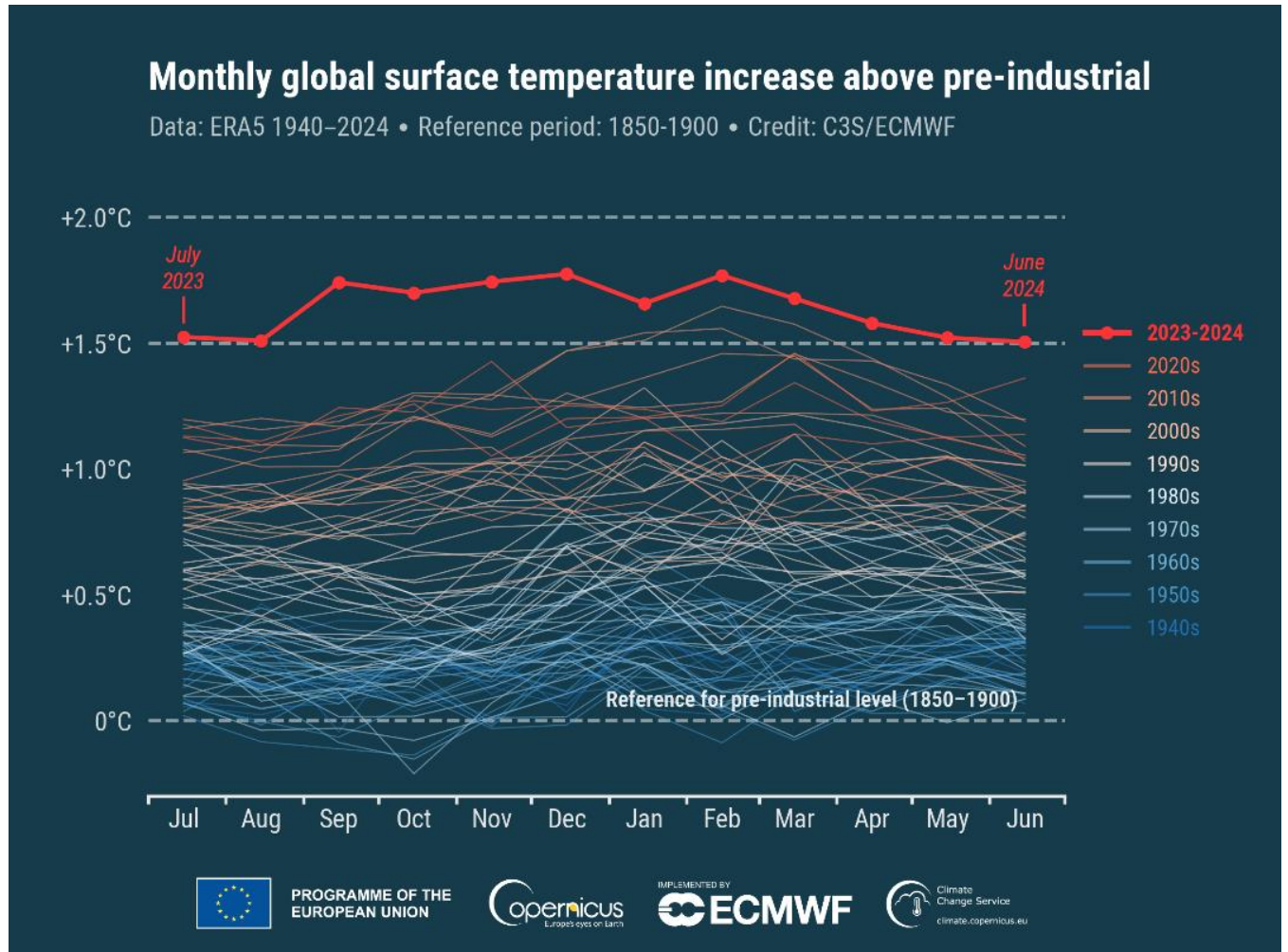
I wonder what you see in this image, which is the symbol of the Season of creation for this year?

I see many hands from different cultures and different races working together to hold fragile creation, allowing it to recover and flourish. The small white dove under the plant points us to the role of God's Spirit working in our hearts to make this co-operation possible. The motivation will come



from love for creation and love for our fellow human beings.

When we think about the current state of the world, the data highlights the harm that humans are doing to the earth.



This is seen in rapidly increasing temperatures, now the hottest in over 15,000 years and increasing each year. We've already reached the 1.5° C threshold that we were trying to stay below according to the Paris Climate accord.

We know that burning fossil fuels is the main contributor to this yet here in Australia we continue to approve new coal mines and new gas fields that will keep pumping out fossil fuels for the next 50 years. I know that we need to heat our homes and use cars and buses to get around, but is there a kinder way to do this that has less impact on the planet?

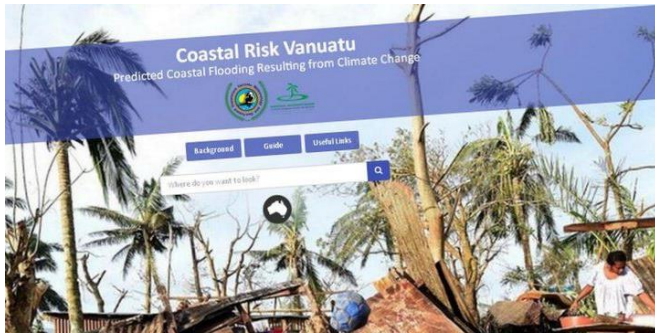
We are also continuing to cut down forests and threaten the existence of endangered animals and birds at an alarmingly rapid rate. The latest report card on Australia's threatened species list now has over 2000 names on it along with more than 100 threatened eco-systems.



New environmental laws promised by the current government are being watered

down due to the pressure brought by mining companies. Winning votes in WA at next year's election seems to be more important than protecting our fragile eco-systems.

Besides the degradation of natural eco-systems, our lifestyles are also having an impact on human communities. Whether it's summer heatwaves killing people in the Middle East, floods destroying communities in central Europe just this week or rising sea levels swamping low lying Pacific islands, human communities across the globe are suffering.



And usually, the people suffering the most are those that have contributed the least to climate change. This is a justice issue, especially for rich Western nations like Australia where our emissions have barely fallen in the last 20 years even while we export vast emissions in our coal and gas.

So what wisdom can we glean from the Scriptures to help us get back on track towards a safer and fairer world where everyone and every creature has the opportunity to not merely survive but also to thrive?

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The message in Micah is fairly blunt. God looks for much more from Israel than merely their worship, however extravagant this may be. The demand in Micah 6:8 that has become something of a theme verse in addressing poverty and injustice is simply this:

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*Do justice (mishpat)*

*Love kindness (hesed)*

*Walk humbly with God*

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Three simple steps.

Three challenges that humanity collectively finds so hard to live out.

We are told several times in the Psalms that God loves justice (mishpat) while in

Amos, God calls for justice (mishpat) to roll down like a river.

Loving kindness (hesed) is an intrinsic part of God's nature.

When Moses asks God to reveal God's name to him, God's response is:

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*Yahweh (I am), Yahweh (I am),  
a God merciful and gracious,  
abounding in loving kindness (hesed) ...  
keeping loving kindness (hesed) for a thousand generations.*

*(Exod 34:6-7)*

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So God wants God's people to reflect God's own character in how they live towards others; seeking justice and demonstrating kindness as they grow in their relationship with him.

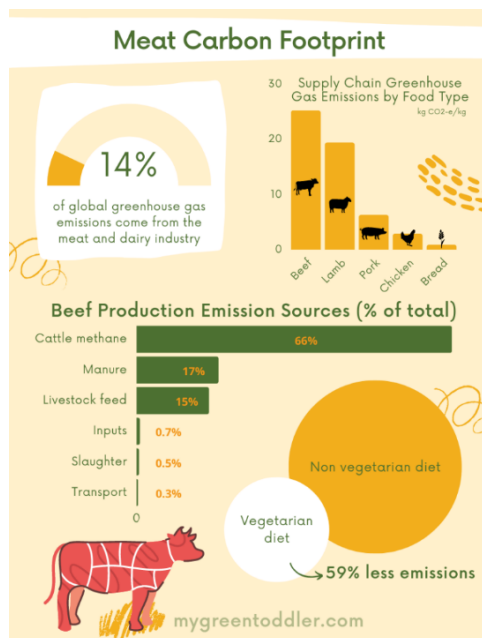
If we know – as we do – that continuing to burn coal, gas and oil at vast rates is causing damage to the earth and damage to human communities, then if we keep going the way we are heading this is not just and not kind.

We are not following the demand of Micah 6:8 and many other similar verses. Rather, whether we consciously think in these terms, we are actually being selfish by focusing on our own wants and convenience.

Instead, we need to do all we can and as quickly as we can to wean ourselves off coal, gas and oil. That's easier said than done of course and comes with a cost, but it's one of the just and kind ways to care for creation. Just last week

people of many different faiths gathered together to send a message to our politicians of their united concern for our planet.





Likewise, if we know that cutting down more and more forests and replacing them with pasture for cattle leads to loss of habitat for many animals, loss of all those trees sucking up CO<sub>2</sub> and lots more cows belching out large amounts of methane, another dangerous greenhouse gas, then we need to change this pattern by changing our eating habits and eat a lot less meat and especially a lot less beef and lamb. Fifteen years ago our youngest son, Jesse, explained the logic of this argument to us and told us that he therefore no longer wanted to eat beef. So for the

past fifteen years we have not purchased any beef and only eat lamb on rare occasions. So although we are not vegetarians and still eat a fair amount of chicken, we are careful about what we put on our plate because we want to be just and kind to all God's creatures.

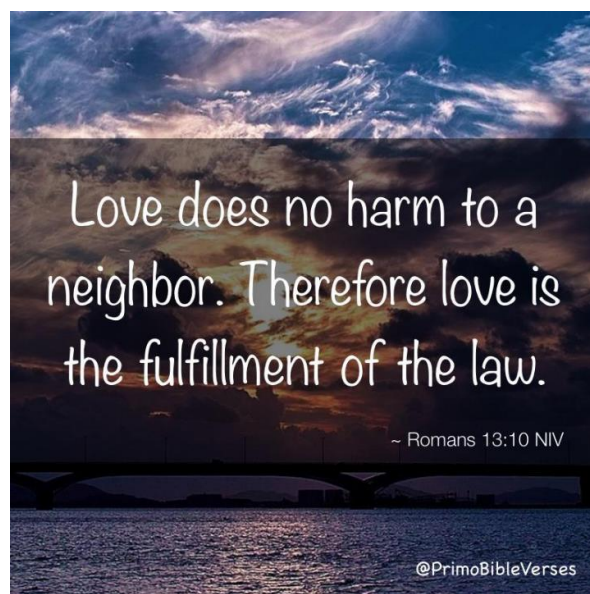
The reading from Paul's letter to the Romans sounds fairly similar to Jesus' teaching that the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. Similar claims are made in letters written by John and James. Loving our neighbour is a core element of Christian practice.

Paul writes that love does no harm to one's neighbour.

And that love fulfils God's law.

Two questions that follow from this command are of course what does love look like in practice and who is my neighbour that I'm called to love?

For Christians, the role model for love is Jesus and his willingness to serve others and meet their needs and even to lay down his life for others. In other words, to realise that meeting the needs of our neighbour have a similar priority to meeting our own needs.



Who is my neighbour is brilliantly illustrated in the story of the Good Samaritan. It turns out that my neighbour is not just the person who lives next door who looks like me and lives like me. Our neighbours are also those from vastly different cultures and backgrounds who may live half a world away.

And in the season of creation, we are encouraged to remember that plants and animals, birds and sea creatures are also our neighbours on this earth.

The gist of this command is actually quite similar to the demand in Micah 6:8, namely to act with love and kindness towards others and to seek justice on their behalf.



As you may have read in the last newsletter, it can be overwhelming to know where to start and what difference our individual actions make in light of all that happens across the world. We certainly need governments to act and to make bold and rapid cuts to our emissions. But we also

need to act as individuals as each seemingly small act increases awareness of the problem and encourages others to act.

If we have eyes to see, there are signs of hope in many places. For instance, it's actually quite hard to drive around the suburbs in any Australian capital city and not see solar panels on people's roofs. Yet I remember that when we installed solar panels on our roof nearly 15 years ago it was quite rare. From little things, big things grow.





Likewise it was quite rare to see an electric vehicle on the road in Australia ten years ago and most of them were Nissan Leafs. If you look now you'll see lots of



Teslas and a whole raft of newer Chinese built EVs.



If you want a more 'hands on' approach to loving our neighbours in nature, there are plenty of local wildlife groups that would love extra volunteers to help care for our local waterways and parks.



**Friends of Tarralla Creek**

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And the Uniting Church has strong connections with Christian communities across the Pacific and in southern Asia. We can support these communities through making donations to Uniting World.



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This past week has also marked the International Day of Peace. Just as we can look at the changing climate and quickly become depressed, so we can look at the seemingly never-ending violence and wars across the world and think that there's nothing we can do.

But if we are to bring peace, this will involve taking similar actions to what we've been talking about already this morning – seeking justice, acting with kindness and loving our neighbours.

If it were possible to survey the whole world, I strongly suspect that peace is what the vast majority of people want. Unfortunately, these desires are ignored and tossed aside by aggressive political and military leaders who want to dominate their neighbour and oppress their neighbour rather than live in peace with them. So we have endless wars and rumours of wars. We have innocent civilians including children and the elderly who suffer.



In the face of all this pain and suffering, what can we do?

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*We can cry out to God in prayer, as we will do shortly.*

*We can remind ourselves and our government of Jesus' call to peace.*

*We can actively support ecumenical groups such as Act for Peace who work on the ground to bring short-term aid as well as long-term opportunities.*

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As we heard last week, hope has two beautiful daughters – anger and courage; anger as to how things are and courage to see that things do not remain as they are.

Whether we are seeking justice for all living creatures, or trying to love our neighbour, or striving for peace, at heart these activities all share a common thread – of reflecting God's nature of justice and kindness and wanting to make a difference for good in the world.

As we conclude our walk through the Season of creation for another year, we'll sing once again the Shirley Erena Murray song *Touch the earth lightly* that picks up many of these themes.

**SONG**    TiS 668 Touch the earth lightly

Touch the earth lightly, use the earth gently,  
nourish the life of the world in our care:  
gift of great wonder, ours to surrender,  
trust for the children tomorrow will bear.

We who endanger, who create hunger,  
agents of death for all creatures that live,  
we who would foster, clouds of disaster,  
God of our planet, forestall and forgive!

Let there be greening, birth from the burning,  
water that blesses and air that is sweet,  
health in God's garden, hope in God's children,  
regeneration that peace will complete.

God of all living, God of all loving,  
God of the seedling, the snow and the sun,  
teach us, deflect us, Christ reconnect us,  
using us gently, and making us one.

Words Shirley Erena Murray. Music Colin Gibson © 1992 Hope Publishing Co. Used by permission.