

A just home for all - 12 September 2021

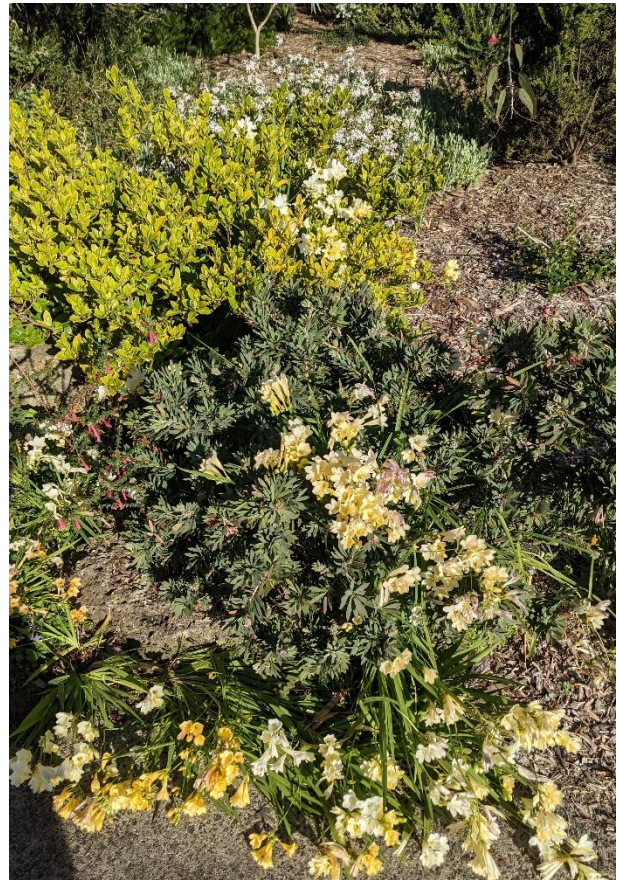
This service is the second of our series on the Season of Creation.

BIBLE READINGS

[Psalm 19:1-4, 7-10](#)

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world. ...

The law of the Lord is perfect,
refreshing the soul.
**The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.**
The precepts of the Lord are right,
giving joy to the heart.
**The commands of the Lord are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.**
The fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring for ever.
**The decrees of the Lord are firm,
and all of them are righteous.**
They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
**they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.**



[Matthew 6:19-21, 25-33](#)

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ...

I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

[James 2:1-8](#)

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism. Suppose a person comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor person in filthy old

clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the one wearing fine clothes and say, 'Here's a good seat for you,' but say to the poor person, 'You stand there' or 'Sit on the floor by my feet,' have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbour as yourself,' you are doing right.

MESSAGE A just home for all

As we saw last week, *oikos* is the Greek word for house or household. This week we will explore how well humanity has handled the *oikonomia* of God's house, the **economy** of managing creation.

In modern times, managing the economy is central to politics and to business. One of the biggest disputes during the Covid pandemic has

been to how to balance keeping **people** safe and healthy and keeping **businesses**



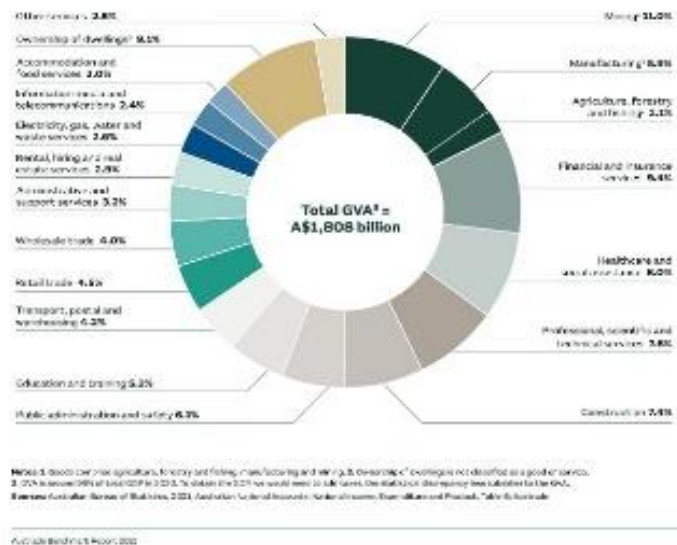
alive. So we saw billions of dollars spent on JobKeeper last year and a near doubling of JobSeeker payments, at least temporarily. Even now there are strongly divided views on the timing of opening up the economy vs what level of vaccination is needed to keep the whole population safe. Another way of asking this question is

when do businesses and profits matter more than protecting the vulnerable? Key questions for many voters at the next election will be who is better at handling the economy and who is better at keeping us safe.

Economics of course is a university subject, where it is part of the Commerce Faculty. At its heart, economics explores the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services – how available resources are managed and how government policies affect human behaviour. This image shows the diversity of activities that make up the Australian economy ...



At the **macro** or **big picture** level, economics might consider why house prices keep on rising in Australia, the effect of changes in the tax system and the challenges of Australia's trade with China. At the **micro** or **household** level, economics might consider issues such as where poorer people are going to live if rents continue to rise, whether now is the right time to purchase a new computer or how household budgets are faring in this second year of extended lockdowns.



You may be surprised to learn that the term **economy** (*oikonomia*) occurs several times in the New Testament along with the term **manager** (*oikonomos*). In Luke 16, for instance, there is a challenging parable about a household manager who defrauds his boss and yet who is apparently commended for his shrewd economic management of using money to earn future favours. Then there is the story in each of

the Gospels about Jesus being anointed with costly perfume before his passion and the argument that follows about the waste – or blessing – of such extravagance. In this example, God's economy is broader than just the money involved – sometimes **grace** and **extravagance** are more important than the careful accounting of each dollar spent. This

The OT prophets – such as Micah – give numerous examples of the importance of **justice** in God's economy, of ensuring that the poor are not exploited by the rich so that the poor have enough to eat and wealth is not hoarded by the rich

and powerful.

Jesus of course had much to say about money and how its use (or misuse) could affect the kingdom of God. So in the reading from Matthew 6, for instance, Jesus urges us not to obsess about food, drink and clothing, but rather to think how we might build up treasure in heaven. The later parable in Matthew about the sheep and the goats illustrates how we might build up such treasure – by feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger and so forth.



The parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates a similar truth, where a foreigner is commended for demonstrating compassion that required him to draw on both his time and his money. These examples all show that God's economy often seems to work quite differently to markets and profits and consumer confidence and all the other things economists debate.

In this Season of Creation, we're invited to reflect on how our management or **stewardship** of God's resources – how we are handling God's economy – affects the lives of those around us ...

Who is our neighbour when we think about creation?

How is care for creation linked to our care for the poor?

How and where might we act to provide a just home for all?

It's interesting that in psalms like the one we read – Psalm 19 – that God's laws can merge seamlessly with praise of God's creation. So creation gives glory to God, just as God's laws and decrees give glory to God. These laws provide guidelines for how people are to live within God's household – in other words – they provide principles for God's economy.



Jesus summarised these laws into two key calls – love and worship God – and love and care for your neighbour. **But who is our neighbour?** Jesus challenged us to think beyond our own family and our own tribe or race.

In a similar way, Aboriginal Christian leaders challenge us to think beyond our **human neighbour** and to consider our **plant neighbour** and our **animal neighbour** and **bird neighbour** – all fellow creatures. So our care for creation can be considered part of how we love our ‘neighbour’.

Pope Francis points to another connection. He suggests that our care for creation includes **how we care for the poor**. So we are called to be **generous** rather than **greedy** – and to not take away the livelihoods of poor farmers so that big corporations can get rich at their expense. Buying **fair trade** products means that the farmers who grew the product get a fair return.



We are called to offer **grace** and not **legalism** – as in the parable of the vineyard workers where all were rewarded to the same extent despite some working much less hours ... hence the good side of JobKeeper payments last year ...

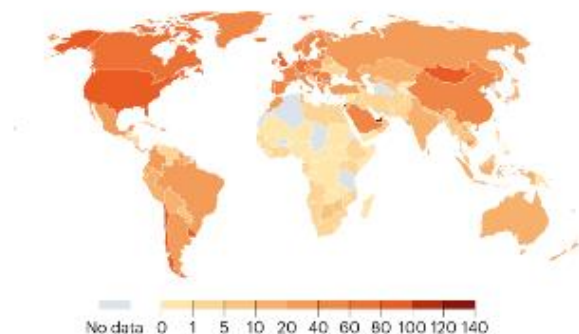


... but one wonders why **Centrelink** recipients are being pursued for **small** overpayments of JobKeeper when **rich businesses** who increased their profits are not pursued for overpayment of \$millions of JobKeeper?

We are also called to pursue justice for the poor when they are exploited in the production or distribution of goods. So while we are somewhat fixated on vaccination rates in Australia right now – as our way out of lockdowns – God’s economy would also have us focus on vaccination rates in **Africa** and the **Pacific**

GLOBAL DOSES

Vaccine roll-outs are uneven across the world, as shown by the number of COVID-19 vaccine doses administered per 100 people in the total population*.



*Data as of 2 June 2021. Data don't reflect the number of people who have been vaccinated because some people have received two doses of a vaccine. Future publications remain neutral with regard to continued, unconditional claims in published maps.

signature

... and about vaccination rates for vulnerable communities, whether indigenous, those living in aged care or part of NDIS or refugees living among us. All populations need protection from coronavirus. All deserve justice.

In thinking about issues such as learning how to live with Covid or how to respond to climate change, God's economy helps give us a kingdom perspective. So rather than getting depressed by daily Covid case numbers or hospitalisation numbers or how **inconvenienced** I feel by lockdowns, we can choose to focus on how to protect and care for the vulnerable.

*Why? Because God's economy tells us that **people** matter more than **profits** and opening up retail and restaurants too quickly.*

Likewise when it comes to climate change, where there are plenty of doom and gloom reports, God's economy would suggest that the health of the **whole of creation** needs to be taken into account and not just the future profitability of mega fossil fuel corporations and their workers. Again it is the most vulnerable groups – whether human or natural ecosystems like the Great Barrier Reef – that most need our urgent support. Rather than wringing our hands, we could advocate to remove subsidies for fossil fuels and instead add incentives for take up of renewable options – whether for cars, for home heating, for electricity generation. At an individual level we can also choose to **consume less, recycle more and plant more trees**.

Why? Because God's economy calls us to care for the **whole of creation** in order to provide a **just home for all of God's creatures**. Amen.

I invite you to join in the lament for the injustice in the world and the call to follow God's less well known path of justice, as shown by Jesus through the words of this song...

Inspired by love and anger

Inspired by love and anger, disturbed by need and pain,
informed of God's own bias, we ponder once again:

"How long must some folk suffer? How long can few folk mind?
How long dare vain self-interest turn prayer and pity blind?"

From those forever victims of heartless human greed,
their cruel plight composes a litany of need:

"Where are the fruits of justice? Where are the signs of peace?
When is the day when prisoners and dreams find their release?"

From those forever shackled to what their wealth can buy,
The fear of lost advantage provokes the bitter cry,
“Don’t query our position! Don’t criticise our wealth!
Don’t mention those exploited by politics and stealth!”
To God, who through the prophets proclaimed a different age,
we offer earth’s indifference, its agony and rage:
“When will the wrongs be righted? When will the kingdom come?
When will the world be generous to all instead of some?”
God asks, “Who will go for me? Who will extend my reach?
And who, when few will listen, will prophesy and preach?
And who, when few bid welcome, will offer all they know?
And who, when few dare follow, will walk the road I show?”
Amused in someone’s kitchen, asleep in someone’s boat,
attuned to what the ancients exposed, proclaimed and wrote,
a Saviour without safety, a tradesman without tools
has come to tip the balance with fishermen and fools.

Words John L. Bell and Graham Maule. Irish folk melody. Arrangement © WGRG, Iona Community. Used with permission.