

Wisdom from planet earth

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

BIBLE READINGS

Proverbs 1:20-33, 30:24-28

Lady Wisdom cries out in the street;
in the squares she raises her voice.

**At the busiest corner she cries out;
at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:**

“How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?

**How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing
and fools hate knowledge?**

Give heed to my reproof;

**I will pour out my thoughts to you;
I will make my words known to you.**

Because I have called and you refused,
have stretched out my hand and no one heeded,

**and because you have ignored all my counsel
and would have none of my reproof,**

I also will laugh at your calamity;

I will mock when panic strikes you,
**when panic strikes you like a storm,
and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish come upon you.**

Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;
they will seek me diligently, but will not find me.

**Because they hated knowledge
and did not choose the fear of the Lord,**

would have none of my counsel,
and despised all my reproof,

**therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way
and be sated with their own devices.**

For waywardness kills the simple,
and the complacency of fools destroys them;

**but those who listen to me will be secure
and will live at ease, without dread of disaster.” ...**

Four things on earth are small,
yet they are extremely wise:

**ants are small and fragile creatures,
yet they store up their food in the summer;**

rock badgers are creatures of little power,
yet they make their home in the crags;

**locusts have no king,
yet they advance together like an army regiment;**

a lizard can be caught with the hand,
yet it is found in kings' palaces.

Mark 8:27-38

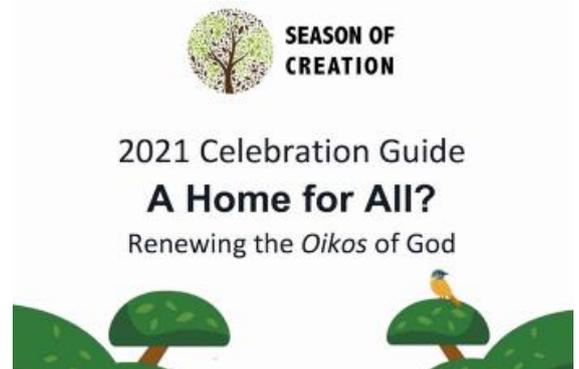
Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, 'Who do people say I am?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah.' Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ... Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: '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 and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.'

MESSAGE Wisdom from the earth

The theme of Season of Creation this year is *A home for all?: Renewing the oikos of God*. As we have seen, *oikos* means house or household and here the *oikos of God* represents the whole earth. This week our focus is on the *oikologia* or **ecology** of the earth and what sources of wisdom we might draw on in our role as stewards or caretakers of creation.

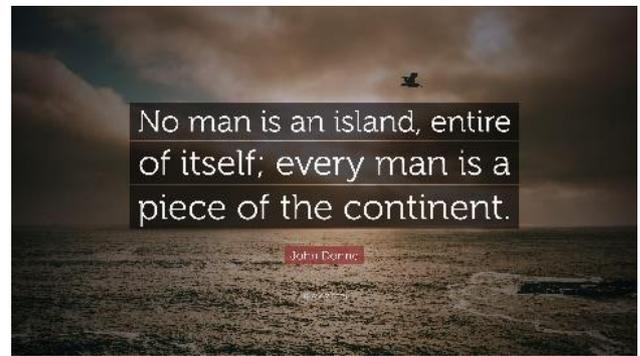
(When thinking about ecology, there is a fair amount of science involved but I've tried to keep it fairly simple in what follows).



Ecology (literally 'study of the house') is the study of the relationships between living organisms – including humans – and their physical environment. Ecology as a scientific discipline is a branch of biology. Related concepts include ecosystems, biodiversity, habitat and sustainable populations. Ecology studies species in their natural environment but

also considers the effect of human activities such as forestry, agriculture, fishing, industrial pollution and urban planning. Two major issues that ecology is currently grappling with are climate change and its effect on the environment and also the extinction of species due to human destruction of their habitat.

English poet John Donne – who was also Dean of St Pauls Cathedral in London – wrote the famous words that ‘No man is an island, entire of itself’ – meaning that nobody lives or exists alone – we are all part of something greater. This has been demonstrated through the pandemic – my individual actions affect the safety and health of others. Each individual person is like a part of a bigger continent, rather than being an island that is isolated and self-sufficient.



While Donne was focused on the connection between humans, ecology highlights the connections and inter-dependence of all life on the earth. So humanity, for instance, relies on plants and animals for our food. Plants utilize CO₂ in photosynthesis and produce oxygen; animals (including humans) and fish do the reverse. So trees – and the ocean – are the parts of creation that absorb CO₂ out of the air, but the problem is that we humans are currently burning coal, oil and gas – and forests – at a faster rate than these natural sinks can absorb. There are numerous other examples of how different parts of creation interact with one another for mutual benefit ... such as flowers and bees, corals and fish. There is wisdom to be learned from these various interactions.



The book of Proverbs is part of the so-called Wisdom literature in the Bible that also includes the books of Job, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. The common link between these books is that they are all based on **observation of life**, especially observations of creation and humanity’s search for how to live a good life. So in the reading above, wisdom is to be gained by observing how ants, rock badgers, locusts and lizards live. From observing these creatures we might learn about the benefits of planning ahead and working together, of seeking a secure place to live and how size and strength are not necessary to live successfully. The earlier part of the passage speaks of the source of true wisdom being God and foolishness is ignoring the ways of God, which leads to calamity and disaster.

The Western capitalist mindset assumes there is no limit to how far we can exploit creation – so we keep fishing the oceans while there are fish to be caught and keep cutting down the forests. If we are to be wise stewards of creation, however, we may

do better to listen to and learn from the indigenous peoples of the world who respect and work with creation so that all life can flourish. This is one reason why indigenous peoples in Australia moved around so much – to avoid



over consumption of any particular food source. They also viewed animals, birds and plants as neighbours to be cared for. As we saw last week, God’s wisdom suggests that rich and poor alike need food to eat and so exploitation of the poor to profit the rich is despised by God. If God is the Creator of all, then a similar argument can be applied to the exploitation of creation that results in destruction of habitat for God’s creatures.

The Gospel reading from Mark contains a stern warning from Jesus. **What good is it, Jesus argues, for a person to gain the whole world yet lose their soul.** Some Christians have interpreted this warning as a call to focus entirely on spiritual matters and the saving of souls so they can go to heaven.



But a better way to hear this warning is that materialism and greed for wealth, power, status or comfort are the things that harden hearts against God and make people selfish. True wisdom is to be found by trusting in God and not blindly following the vested interests that are slowly destroying God’s world.

When it comes to caring for creation, there are many ecological signs that point to **ill-health** and **threat**. You can probably think of many. Some that come to mind include

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- Melting glaciers and rain falling in Greenland, hastening the melting of its ice sheets
- The black summer bushfires that devastated much forest in eastern and southern Australia and which killed and displaced billions of animals and birds
- Repeated bleaching events of the Great Barrier Reef



- The clogging of waterways and oceans with plastics
- The extinction of species as their habitat is destroyed for mining projects

There are other signs, however, that paint a more **hopeful picture**, especially if we learn wisdom from what can be achieved when we listen and work together ...

- The repair of the ozone layer as the use of CFCs for refrigeration was phased out
- The recovery in whale numbers as whaling was effectively banned
- The resilience and recovery of forests after bushfires (although often with reduced biodiversity)
- Two Australian states – South Australia and Tasmania – are now often powered by 100% renewable sources
- Bans on single use plastics



Finally a blessing by Alison Overeem, an indigenous Christian leader from Tasmania ...

In relation with all of creation, walking with, listening to,
being guided by mother earth – guiding in all we do.

When we care for mother earth, she cares for us.

When we listen and learn from her
she guides us in our calling to care for all creation:

every branch, every rock and hill, oceans, waterways, skies and animals.

If we listen carefully, we will be guided by the call of the ocean,

the gentle breeze of the trees,

the surrounds and sights abounding us,

calling us to care for, to be with, to learn from, to protect.

A relationship that knows no bounds.

A relationship that calls us to be.

The connection to our Creator is embedded in love.

Love for, love with, closer, gentler, in connection with all creation.