

Acting wisely?

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

BIBLE READINGS

[Genesis 2:4-9, 15](#)

In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ...

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

[James 3:13-18](#)

Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

[Mark 12:28-31](#)

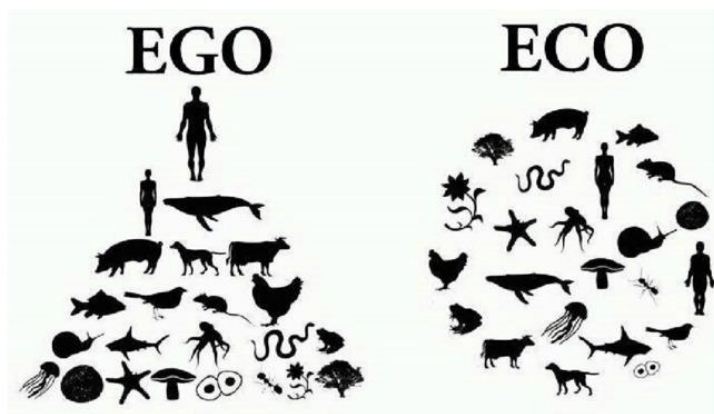
One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.'

MESSAGE

Welcome to our combined celebration of the Season of creation. The theme this year is *A home for all? : Renewing the oikos of God*. The word *oikos* means house or home and in this context refers to the earth, our common home. In earlier weeks we have considered the *oikonomia* (economy) of God's house and *oikologia* (ecology) of God's house. Today we will consider our call to care for the *oikomenay* of God (our **common home**).

The reading from Genesis 2 states that God created the first man (*Adam*) from the dust of the earth (*adamah*). This suggests that humanity is part of creation, and not above it. As we know, one day our mortal life will end and our bodies will return to the dust from which they are made: in the words of the funeral liturgy it will be 'dust to dust'.

In this passage, Adam is placed in the garden of Eden by God and is given a **vocation** or **task**, which is to till and take care of God's garden. This role is akin to that of a **gardener**, providing the right conditions for the plants in the garden to thrive, and to provide a suitable place for the animals, birds and insects that also make their home in the garden. Hence the role for humanity is to order the garden but not exploit the garden for selfish purposes.



This image highlights the difference between **ego** and **eco**. The word **ego** means 'I' in Greek and the image on the left shows how this often works in practice with man at the top of the pile, above woman, and ruling over the rest of creation. It suggests having power or dominion **over**

creation. Such thinking places man in control of and disconnected from the rest of creation. The vocation to care for the garden is easily corrupted by self-interest.

Unfortunately, our Western mindset often encourages us to think in this way. For centuries, humans have ordered our lives and our economies according to the logic of markets rather than the limits of the earth. This false logic **exploits** the *oikos* of God, and makes creation a means to economic or political ends. The current exploitation of land, plants, animals and oceans for profit results in the loss of habitats that are homes for millions of species, including many humans, whose homes are at risk due to climate change, sea level rises and damage from drought and storm and bushfire.

The alternative mindset on the right suggests that we take seriously the **eco-system** of the earth, a word derived from *oikos*, meaning our **common** or **shared home**. In this way of thinking, we are **part** of creation – as in the Genesis story – and are called into **partnership** with the rest of creation, to mutually support the other parts of creation. **Ecology** explores this inter-connectedness and inter-dependence of all living things.

- Insects and plants rely on each other
- we humans rely on plants and animals for food
- there is an intricate web of life that allows every creature to thrive.

This way of thinking is much more typical of indigenous peoples as they tend to live in much closer connection with creation and therefore have greater respect for other creatures and plants. In this way of thinking, the health of whole eco-systems is more important than profits or politics.

The second reading from James likewise contrasts two forms of wisdom. The first type of wisdom that is labelled **earthly** or **unspiritual** is marked by envy, selfish ambition, boasting, disorder and lies.

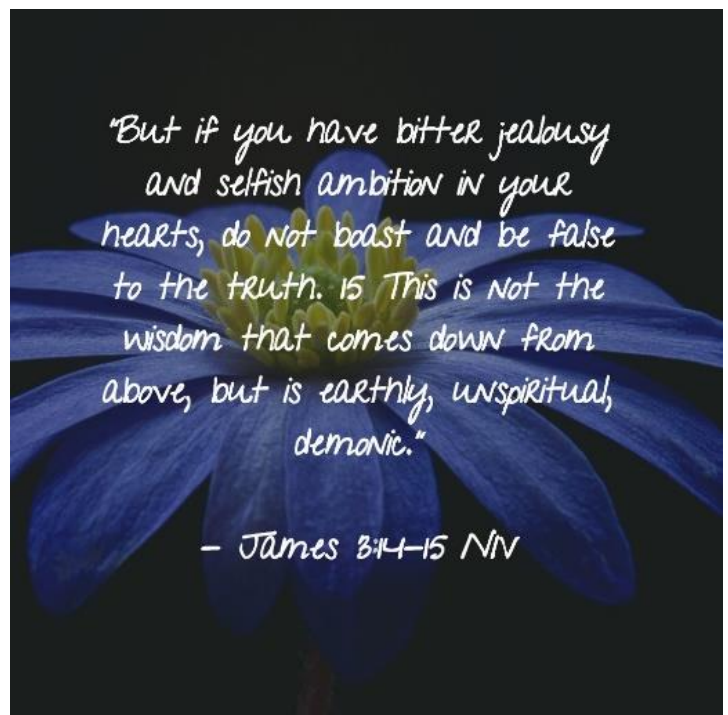
It sounds a bit like Federal politics!

Or the advertising industry.

Or perhaps the operation of many large businesses. But it can also describe our individual lives, which can be driven by the desire, for instance, of keeping up to date with

the latest gadgets even though our current gadgets are still working fine. It's characterized by FOMO – fear of missing out – and thinking that the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.

This contrasts with **godly wisdom** – the wisdom that comes from above – that is pure, gentle, full of mercy, willing to yield and wanting to seek peace. This sense of peace reflects the Hebrew concept of *shalom*, which is not so



much an absence of war and violence but a sense of harmony and wholeness where every person and every part of creation knows their place and enjoys the blessings of what they have.

Two examples that illustrate the two types of wisdom. Over the past 10 days or so we've been trying to get our heads around the new defence pact between Australia, the US and the UK that comes with the carrot of nuclear powered submarines ... at some undisclosed but enormous cost and at some unknown



time in the future. This decision has rightly pissed off France, whose contract to build conventional subs has been torn up. It has also angered China and many of our nearby neighbours who see Australia as being more committed to old colonial powers than to the Asian region. The decision smacks of wanting to appear strong and macho, but makes the pursuit of peace in our region that much more difficult. What type of wisdom is to be seen here?

A second example is humanity's response to **climate change**. Humans are **intelligent** – we have accurately observed changes in the world's climate over decades and can see multiple signs of the damage being caused by continual burning of fossil fuels.



Humans are also highly **ingenious** and capable of solving complex problems. So we have developed solutions that address rising

carbon emissions – things like renewable energy from wind and solar, electric vehicles, more extensive and intensive recycling. But there is limited political will to implement these solutions. So what type of wisdom are we pursuing?

Are we wanting to provide a safe and stable home for all creatures?

Or are we content to risk destroying our home planet to satisfy the selfish greed of some?

I put this in fairly stark terms because there are not many species that would actively and knowingly destroy their home – yet we humans are well on track to do this within

a few generations. We can of course change, but we will need to make **BIG** and **URGENT** changes to our **economy** in order to preserve the **ecology** of our planet. Can we do this? Of course! We are intelligent and ingenious creatures – but we need to rapidly learn a different wisdom.

The third reading from the Gospel is Jesus' summary of the entire OT law. The commandments of God as revealed to Moses come down ultimately to two – love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbour as yourself. According to Jesus, there is no commandment greater than these.

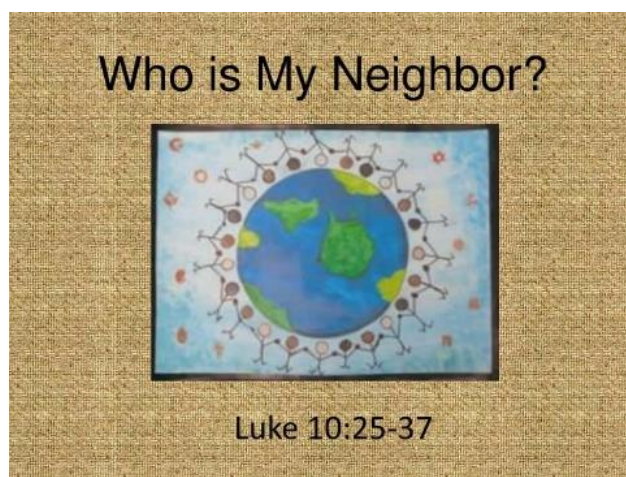
In Luke's version of this story, the Jewish scribe pushes Jesus further and asks 'who is my neighbour?' Jesus responds with the story we know as the parable of the Good Samaritan that expands the definition of neighbour to include people we may regard as outsiders or even enemies.

This expansive outlook is reflected in the ministry of Jesus who welcomes many people who were considered beyond the reach of God's blessing – including women, children, foreigners, the sick, the dying, those engaged in dubious professions, even traitors like Judas.

When it comes to our vocation to care for creation, it's worthwhile pondering this question of who is my neighbour again. Indigenous Christians challenge us to broaden our thinking to include our plant neighbours, our animal neighbours, our water

neighbours, our bird neighbours and even our insect neighbours. How can we love them? How can we provide the right conditions for them to thrive? How can we renew and restore God's house so that all life can flourish?

A local example ... We grow quite a few vegies at our place and have several fruit trees. Some of our animal and bird neighbours – for instance possums and cockatoos



– enjoy eating the fruit and vegies. So how might I change my frustration at their behaviour towards love?

Part of the answer is that as species they were here long before me or my ancestors. They belong here. They are part of God's good creation.

My vocation is to care for God's garden. Therefore I need to change my attitude from selfishness to sharing and from anger to acceptance. I need to work on this more...

In the face of the many and varied challenges facing creation – just within Australia – what might we do?

- First we might **pray**. In the Lord's Prayer we pray that God's will would be done here on earth. Part of God's will – as revealed in Scripture – is to take seriously our call to care for creation and to love our neighbour, interpreted broadly. There is an important global climate conference starting next month in Glasgow called CoP26 that will set frameworks and encourage all nations to make big and urgent reductions in carbon emissions. Pray for Australia's political leaders of the Liberal and Nation parties to change their thinking and to see beyond the vested interests of their advisors and donors and to commit Australia to play our fair share in what needs to be done.
- Which leads to another action we could take. It's not too late to **lobby** our local Liberal MP, Michael Sukkar, to show that there are many people in his electorate, including many Christians, who are passionate about climate change and the need to act urgently and realistically. You can email Mr Sukkar or leave messages at his office. You could fill in one of the postcards from TEAR or [sign their online petition](#).
- Finally, there are many small and varied changes that each of us can make to **reduce our impact on the local environment**. We could ...
 - invest in solar panels on our roof,
 - consider buying an electric or hybrid vehicle,
 - eat less beef and lamb,
 - rethink holidays needing flight or use carbon offsets
 - compost food scraps instead of sending them to landfill,
 - buy locally produced food and clothing. The list goes on ...
- We might **join** one of the several groups committed to cleaning up our waterways, planting trees, learning from our indigenous brothers and sisters ... Again there are many opportunities to be involved.

- As an exercise, you could visit a local park or creek and just sit quietly and **observe nature** around you.

What can you see?

What can you hear?

What do you sense God's Spirit saying to you?

Make this a regular part of your week ...

I want to close with a prayer ...

Source of all life,

God of the lush forests,

God of the clean air,

God of the clear waters,

God of every living creature,

open our eyes, minds and hearts to see that we are all connected,

all part of the same amazing network of life:

what hurts and pollutes one, hurts and pollutes the other.

Help us to listen to you and to repent from our destructive ways,

so that your wonderful, diverse planet can breathe again and live,

and we and our children and our grandchildren with it. Amen.