

Creationtide Sermon - Week One

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by Melanie Seward

Readings: Psalm 8; Matthew 24. 14-30

Whose world is it anyway?



For many of us, nature has been a great escape in Lockdown, whether that has meant lots of walks, topping up the birdfeeder, watching David Attenborough's programmes or gazing at the night sky when sleep evades us. Lockdown led to decreased levels of traffic pollution. For some, it led to a 'back to basics' approach to cooking. Also, just a lot more people got out there and enjoyed the countryside. Why? Because nature is a blessing, and by this is often meant 'it's a freebie'- that is good for us - it's a gift!

Now, 'gift' is an interesting word. I wonder what gifts we have had this year. Unwanted gifts, long-awaited gifts, unexpected and underserved gifts, precious gifts and our favourite types of gift. Whatever they were, any gift was

given to us and ceased to be the property of the giver. The gift became yours or mine to do with as we please – although that might upset the giver if they found out – technically, it was no longer anything to do with them.

If we could interview the author of the Psalm, he would not talk about nature or the world as a 'gift' to humankind. He has a completely different take. He says, let's start by looking at who is the central character. He begins 'O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!' His view is 'God centric', not based on what any humans might desire, or think is right, at any given time. And then he considers the contrast between ourselves and God. God has set his glory 'above the heavens' – he transcends everything we know and he will be ever-present when we are long gone. Looking at the night sky, the Psalmist paints a picture of God setting the moon and stars in place with his fingers – he is explaining, poetically, that making a world is quite within the omniscient power of the Creator. Humankind, on the other hand, is made up of men and woman, who are frail in comparison and leave the world for others to come. They are mortals. The Hebrew words translated highlight our frailty and weakness in relation to the One God on whom we depend like babies and toddlers.

But we have been given 'glory and honour', being made 'a little less than the angels' (in the King James and Revised Standard translations), or a little less than 'heavenly beings' or 'the divine' in others. Humans have been honoured, created to be distinct from animals because they have been placed as rulers over creation – Wow! This is an amazing

God! In his awesome power and wisdom, he chooses to give man this charge.

However, man's 'dominion' is based on an authority derived from God and we are, as in Genesis 1, the stewards who govern – not the owners. But, remember, we are only a little less than the angels – God has not taken leave of his senses, he has built into the equation our great potential to undertake our responsibilities.

In the parable of the Talents, the Master gives out responsibility for his wealth according to 'the ability' of the individuals. The first two work to increase their Talents, but the third simply buries it to keep it safe. The identical statement made to the first two servants praised makes it clear that it is not about the amount made, but about how they have used their abilities and so have fulfilled their responsibilities to the Master. Meanwhile, the final servant is not willing to make the Master's money work in any shape or form – he did not even give his money to foreign currency exchangers (who would not have returned interest but would have paid him a fee for loaning them the money) to use in their work. He is not proactive. He is lazy. He is doubly punished – first the Talent is taken away and then the servant is thrown into the darkness. The first two servants act out of loyalty (and love) of their Master, whilst the third's response is shaped by fear and mistrust.

Back to our God-given role of having 'dominion' over creation. We are accountable to God in caring for His Creation. To do this, we will need to use all of our God-given abilities. Both man-made and natural – climate change.

limited natural resources, political instability, injustice and population movement are the challenges we face. In the nature of our very creation, God has empowered us to carry out our role and he continues to empower us. Doing nothing is not an option – we will be held accountable for standing by: out of fear, through blaming others and pointing at God, implying it's all his responsibility, and, most of all, for not maintaining hope and trust in our Master. The psalmist says that we, as God's children, are vulnerable and weak – utterly dependent on God – and yet (verse two) out of this dependence can come great resistance to God's enemies.

The processes of pollution, global warming and destruction of habitat all lead to the enemies called famine and drought and conflict. Fundamentally, we need to work for the healing of creation, each according to our abilities. Buy loose apples (reduce plastic), use a bowl and a plate (not cling film or foil), buy fair trade (not support modern slavery), walk instead of ride or share a lift (not add to our carbon footprint), sign a petition or support a charity that looks after the environment, invest ethically, remember those across the world with water and food poverty. This is a dream that can come true if we recognise the source of our power and abilities. With God's guidance, we can fulfil our shared human role in caring for the world together.

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