

Year B, Proper 18, Creationtide 1, 2021

On this first Sunday of our observance of Creationtide at Christ Church we are reminded by the Psalmist (Psalm 146) amongst other things that God is the creator of all things, that justice will prevail, that the poor will be fed and importantly that God reigns. The Psalmist pens these words about the God of Jacob as follows,

Who made heaven and earth,  
the sea and all that is in them;

Who gives justice to those that suffer wrong •  
and bread to those who hunger.

The Lord shall reign for ever, •  
your God, O Zion, throughout all generations. Alleluia.

This is the God we praise, we worship and adore with one heart and mind bound together by the work of God that has found a home in us sealed by our baptism.

A few years ago we at CCV committed ourselves as a community to be intentional regarding our stewardship of creation as individuals and as a community, to increase awareness, to change attitudes and to deepen commitments. Acknowledging that there are deficits in this area of Christian life. How did we commit ourselves? We added to our mission statement, additions which were accepted by the Christ Church Annual Meeting in 2018. Let me quote the relevant passages once again to hold before us what the electoral members committed themselves to and all of us by extension.

Christ Church ... invites people from every walk... to participate in God's mission to the world as disciples of Jesus and stewards of God's creation.

Led by God's grace, we aim to... inspire our community to live and work to God's praise and glory... Build a culture of stewardship... Work together to embed environmental concerns in our worship, teaching and action.

Last week I spoke about the need to take Christian formation seriously. This leads me to say something that might surprise some and possibly offend others. Regardless of there being an environmental crisis, global warming or climate change our Christian formation, should we take it seriously, should lead us to be desirous of making good use of the resources that God has provided in creation. What I am saying is: our response should be the same whether we are in a crisis and at a breaking point or not. Of course the indicators that scientists have determined and our own observations should add urgency and impact to our actions.

The above means that my approach is one that originates in being a Christian who believes that God is the creator and sustainer of all of creation and who affords humans the freedom, ability and nous to cooperate with his good purposes according to his will. Today's Eucharistic prayer speaks of humans as being the crown of all creation, but we can also in terms of our existence bring about our own downfall. We can cooperate with God's purposes for mother earth or we can fly in the face of them; that is how much freedom we have been given. In Luke's Gospel Jesus says, 'Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much.' Luke 16:10

Whether or not you accept that there is a crisis and sceptics there are even in such an august body as ours it is a Christian duty and I would add joy to be good stewards of all that God provides and especially everything that passes through our hands. There is a saying which can be a starting block for each of us. "Become the change you desire." It begins with little things. How much food gets thrown away because oversupply has become a habit? How long do we wear our clothes? Do we resole our shoes? Do we recycle? Admittedly it is an effort. What does our diet look like? How do we heat our homes? How do we use our cars? Do we need one? We all know as an international community our dependency on air travel. Can we become less dependent? Have we considered fasting not only during Lent? By our keeping of

Creationtide we are being invited to heighten our awareness of how we order our lives as Christians. “Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much.” A Christian ordering of our lives before God is one way by which we honour God so that we may not only honour God with our lips, but in our lives. It is also a way of allowing our lives to be God orientated that can in turn give orientation to others.

Our formation as human beings begins in our families, in our peer groups, in our schools, in our communities, in the cadets, scouts, choirs, football clubs etc and in our colleges and universities, as well as in the church. These need to be looked at and re-examined. There may be things that we need to unlearn and to relearn. At our best we Christians are in conversation with the learning of today centred in affirming that “Christ has first place in all things”. (Colossians 1.18b) At times this will not be easy, but our Christian formation requires of us a deep willingness to be God orientated and open. It also requires deep humility and true respect that isn’t simply lip service of which there is far too much, while acknowledging hypocrisy.

Last Sunday we reminded ourselves of the first great love commandment, “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.” So let us begin to love that which God has created. Being good stewards of God’s abundant provision, as individuals and Christian communities, is one way in which we evidence to ourselves and to each other our love of God. In today’s epistle, from the letter of James, we heard that faith will always seek to express itself in acts. Acts that honour God by our love for the whole of God’s creation. In today’s epistle we are reminded of the second commandment that derives from the first and for a Christian must not to be decoupled from the first. Our love of God gives direction and content to what we are, what we are becoming as well as our actions and especially love of our neighbour.

In today’s gospel we see Jesus making his way from Tyre to the Decapolis skirting Galilee. The Decapolis was an area of ten Greek cities mainly to the east of the River Jordan and the Sea of Galilee. Mark the Evangelist gives us a picture of movement not unlike a film. We see Jesus on the move, if we slow down for a bit. The encounter with

the Syrophoenician woman who is also possibly culturally Greek opens to Jesus a new perspective on his ministry. She calls on him as an advocate for her daughter, challenging Jesus in a way that makes it possible for him to extend his mission. Having first ministered to the People of Israel, God's chosen people, causing some offence amongst his hearers, he now goes straight to the Decapolis having been engaged by the advocate of a daughter, the Syrophoenician woman. The people of the Decapolis have heard of this man, who can heal. His reputation goes before him. A group of people come to Jesus. They are advocates for a man Jesus probably would not have encountered otherwise. This time the man is deaf. He has an impediment of speech. There is a contrast with the Syrophoenician's daughter who is possessed. Jesus heals the deaf man. The command is telling. It is simply "Be opened." "Ephphatha".

So let us open ourselves to seeking new ways to be good stewards of God's creation not out of necessity, but because of our love of God in the knowledge that God has created all things including each one of us. "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. (Genesis 1.31) Who will bring us to Jesus should we be possessed or be closed to stay with the biblical imagery of today's Markan gospel. Who cares enough that they will bring people to Jesus the teacher and healer? Who is sufficiently unembarrassed by their Christian faith that they are ready to be counted and to make fools of themselves for the sake of Christ? May such be emboldened to bring to God those who are deaf, those whose speech is impaired and those who are possessed. Let us allow God to minister to our closedness.

Our ministry of stewardship begins with each one of us gathered here. It doesn't stop short of the doors of our homes, but seeks entry. Be opened. Jesus' public ministry takes him to Galilee, to Tyre, to the Decapolis, to Samaria and on to Jerusalem. His death brings life to the world. Our being Christian will find entry into the chambers of our heart, our homes, how we order our affairs, how we expend ourselves, our relationships. We are to be advocates for being good stewards of all that God has given us and the whole of creation. It is through such action grounded in faith that we honour God with our lives and our actions giving thanks for the gift of faith. Lives orientated to Christ who is our compass. This way of life means whether there is a crisis or not it should precede the crisis, sustain us throughout the crisis and continue

the same after the crisis. Ours cannot be simply a utilitarian approach, but rather it is grounded in Christian formation where Christ is first in all things in response to the call "Follow me". It is our joy.

"Christ yesterday and today,  
the beginning and the end,  
Alpha and Omega,  
all time belongs to him,  
and all ages;  
to him be glory and power,  
through every age and forever. Amen".