

Creator God; sustaining life

Readings: Genesis 1:26 – 31, Mark 16:14 - 16

We Turned on the Light

We turned on the light
And flooded the city

We drove the car faster
And saw the dust blowing

We bought a new tee-shirt
And turned the grass yellow

We ate cherries in the winter
And heard the gale howling

We wrapped the food in plastic
And saw the bears starving

We chopped down a forest
And heard a child choking

We doubled our output
And killed to get water

We flew to the sunshine
And saw the ice falling

My granddaughter's granddaughter says to my ghost: I hate you.

My ghost says: I'm sorry now.

My granddaughter's granddaughter says to my ghost: Didn't you love me?

My ghost says: Not enough. It's hard to love people far away in time

The flowers are growing higher up the mountain.

© Caryl Churchill

God's world is in crisis whether we like to think about it or not. And it isn't God who brought it to crisis point!

God made this amazing world – a fortnight ago we talked about this and looked at some cool things that make up this earth. We didn't consider in any depth the systems that God set up to sustain the earth though: the atmosphere with its delicate balance of gases for example. The atmosphere is a mixture of nitrogen (78%), oxygen (21%), and

other gases (1%). The further we get from earth, the thinner the atmosphere becomes until it gradually reaches space. Most of you will know our atmosphere is divided into five layers. The first layer is where most of the weather and clouds are found.

Or what about the water cycle? Remember that from primary school science? The Creator established the ultimate pumping station that reuses everything!

How about the tidal system that governs our ocean?

Or the ecosystem within the ocean itself.

Creator God has made all of this for God's own delight. God made it all so lovingly with such detail. All Creator God has asked us to do is to care for it; to sustain what originated within God's creative imagination and power.

So how are we doing with that?

An excerpt from Allan and Christine's recent newsletter (It's Allan writing):

My latest phone app makes a slurping noise like water going down the sink telling me (Allan) to take another drink so I can avoid the severe dehydration that my body has been experiencing for the past several weeks. The goal in a climate of low humidity, (5-20%) and heavy pollution is to drink 3 litres of fluid per day and not drink caffeinated items like coffee and green tea. It also tells me when I should either snooze or eat something!

Then there is the other app which tells us when we should stay inside because the air is too polluted or whether we should wear face masks, which is most days.

Ok, that's a long way away. We know that Asia faces huge challenges as the population and technology advance at an alarming rate.

But we are okay aren't we?

Well are we?

Our atmosphere is changing. Nasa states that 97% of scientists agree¹ that climate-warming trends over the past century are very likely due to human activities, and most of the leading scientific organizations worldwide have issued public statements endorsing this position.

I know some people are sceptical about this. But scientists are conservative people. Without good hard empirical evidence, scientists will hold back. Scientists are not generally in the business of making rash statements.

Dave Bookless, who has been theologian for La Rocha, a Christian environmental organisation, says that climate change can be likened to putting too many blankets on a bed. When we do that we get too hot. He goes on to say:

“..‘thickening’ the atmosphere with excessive greenhouse gases (of which Carbon Dioxide is the main one) overheats the whole planet. ... burning coal, gas and oil creates large amounts of CO₂, and that ever since the industrial revolution humanity has been increasing the CO₂ in the atmosphere.”²

The really scary thing is that climate change is happening rapidly. Also happening rapidly is the increase in pollution generally. We talk about NZ and our clean green image but do we deserve that description?

Two years ago the Nelson Mail ran an article entitled ‘Nelson river contamination raises health concerns’.³ In Nelson water near the Collingwood St Bridge and the Paremata flats is consistently rated at D; very poor; should be avoided for swimming.⁴ According to the TDC online map, early this month, only one monitored site in our area is of concern.⁵ That is the Tukurua river north of Takaka. The map shows a yellow flag indicating that the health risk for recreational activities may have increased and they are collecting more samples. Not too bad I suppose.

But what about the health of the ocean floor? Another Nelson Mail article from August last year shows the amount of rubbish collected by a small group of divers from the waters of Anchorage and Adele Island. It included smashed batteries, a woodburner, over 600 bottles, that boaties simply couldn’t be bothered taking home.

¹ W. R. L. Anderegg, “Expert Credibility in Climate Change,” Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences Vol. 107 No. 27, 12107-12109 (21 June 2010); DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1003187107.

P. T. Doran & M. K. Zimmerman, "Examining the Scientific Consensus on Climate Change," Eos Transactions American Geophysical Union Vol. 90 Issue 3 (2009), 22; DOI: 10.1029/2009EO030002.
N. Oreskes, “Beyond the Ivory Tower: The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change,” Science Vol. 306 no. 5702, p. 1686 (3 December 2004); DOI: 10.1126/science.1103618.

² A sermon given by Dave Bookless in 2007 called “The heat is on”.

³ Nelson Mail 14 Jan 2013

⁴ <http://nelson.govt.nz/assets/Environment/Downloads/scorecards/Recreational-Bathing-Water-Quality-Annual-Monitoring-Summary-2012-13.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.tasman.govt.nz/environment/water/swimming-water-quality/>

Air pollution has been a concern for some time. Both the pollution generated by wood burners and industrially. John Palmer made a submission to TDC a couple of years ago regarding Nelson Pine Industries permission to continue their toxic emissions. TDC granted the permission regardless of the submissions against it.

We are not immune from pollution and litter and waste and smell and We need a regional landfill now because we have almost filled up the two existing sites in Richmond and Nelson.

And why should we care?

Two reasons –

1. Because God told us to do a job and we need to do it
2. Because Jesus commanded us to love our neighbour as ourselves

In Christ all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. Col 1:16

God created this beautiful world and Christ is central in this world. All things have been created through him and for him. While God and his Christ, are at work sustaining still, we are God's co-workers. Various translations describe the Genesis command as what we are to do with God's world – subdue reign, rule, master it, govern – the best translation though is to steward God's world. It is not our world in one sense. We live here, we will live here for every by the way. In our 9am service we changed an old original line from the hymn How Great Thou Art, because it was very dodgy theology. It said "and take me home" and we changed it to "and redeem this home." When Jesus comes again, he comes down to this earth. A new city comes down and God will be worshipped there. We will not live somewhere else. Heaven will be on earth.

Genesis 2:5 - 8

Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground... Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.

And we are the lucky ones – most impact of pollution and climate change is felt in the developing world. In his report on 'The Economics of Climate Change' way back in 2006, Sir Nicholas Stern (former Chief Economist at the World Bank) stated in his report on climate change, *"The impacts are inequitable: poor countries will be hit hardest and earliest, when it is the rich countries responsible for ¾ of Greenhouse Gases currently in*

the atmosphere".⁶ We can't blame China and India – it's mostly us who are to blame. We are commanded to love our neighbour; the least of these, and we aren't doing it.

Dave Bookless⁷ says when faced with the evidence about what is happening we take one of four positions. We become

The Ostrich – Like prophets of old we'd rather say 'Peace, peace where there is no peace'.⁸ But Christians must face up to the truth – however uncomfortable or inconvenient it is.

The Lemming – Some will remember 'Dad's Army.' The idiot Corporal Fraser would often say "We're all doomed!" Some believe that we've reached the point of no return. Christians though have faith in the Creator and Sustainer, God himself. God's power has to give us hope.

The Headless Chicken – doing something is urgent. The scourge of our age is busyness – we must not be sucked into panic or manic behaviour.

We are to be stewards, gardeners, carers not rapists, pollutants, people who could care less. It behoves us to take care of this earth. It's the only one we've got.

And we need to know that God is with us. We don't work alone. Jesus is with us. The Holy Spirit is at work. We need to respond to what God is already doing in ways we can. We don't need to stress about the things we can't do. We do need to do the things we can do.

'The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it'.⁹ While the state of the created world impacts us hugely, and the poor in our world even more than us, it is not our responsibility alone. We don't have to carry the burden alone.

God promises "that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God"¹⁰ Jesus came to redeem the whole of creation. The created world will be renewed and released and beautiful again because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Our hope doesn't mean ignoring the bad news of our world's decay, but it does mean living today knowing there is a tomorrow and contributing to that tomorrow.

⁶ The Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change is a 700-page report released for the British government on 30 October 2006 by economist Nicholas Stern, chair of the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at the London School of Economics and also chair of the Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy (CCCEP) at Leeds University and LSE.

⁷ Dave Bookless, *The heat is on*

⁸ Jer 6:14

⁹ Psalm 24:1

¹⁰ Romans 8:21

There are lots of practical steps we can take towards working with God to renew creation. Good steps. You might like to suggest what those steps might look like – both for you as an individual in your one situation, and also for us as Church on the Hill.

Perhaps one of the most important steps is to love and enjoy what God has given us. How often do you go for a walk or sit in your garden and enjoy this beautiful world? Yesterday was Valentines day. Someone has suggested we let God romance us and bless you through the beauty of this world. How might doing that contribute to our worship and then our stewardship?