



# LOCKDOWN WORSHIP

**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2021**

**Today's reflection is prepared for us by Ian Kilgour**

**Call to Worship** (*Inspired by the 'Season of Creation' and Psalms 19 and 24*)

**In the name of our Maker and Creator God we celebrate!**



*"The heavens are telling the glory of the Lord; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork."*

*All around us are signs and wonders, fingerprints of the creator. Praise be to God!*

*"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it; the world, and all who live in it."*

*All around us we find life; all the created world is related to us. Praise be to God!*

*Come, let us dwell in God's work of art!*

*Here in this wondrous world we are not alone.*

*We share this life with the heavens and the earth...*

*With the waters and the land, with trees and grasses, With fish, birds, and animals, with minerals and creatures of every form, and with all our brothers and sisters. Praise be to God!*

*God is good and everything God makes is good.*

*Praise to the creator of all that is, seen and unseen!*

***Hallelujah and Amen.***

## **Hymn - 'Canticle to the creatures' by St Francis**

- Most high, all powerful, all good Lord! All praise is yours, all glory, all honour, and all blessing. To you, alone, Most High, do they belong. No mortal lips are worthy to pronounce your name.
- Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures, especially through my lord Brother Sun, who brings the day; and you give light through him. And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour! Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

- Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars; in the heavens you have made them, precious and beautiful.
- Be praised, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air, and clouds and storms, and all the weather, through which you give your creatures sustenance.
- Be praised, My Lord, through Sister Water; she is very useful, and humble, and precious, and pure.
- Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you brighten the night.
- He is beautiful and cheerful, and powerful and strong.
- Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Mother Earth, who feeds us and rules us, and produces various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.
- Be praised, my Lord, through those who forgive for love of you; through those who endure sickness and trial. Happy those who endure in peace, for by you, Most High, they will be crowned.
- Be praised, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whose embrace no living person can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin! Happy those she finds doing your most holy will. The second death can do no harm to them.
- Praise and bless my Lord, and give thanks, and serve him with great humility.

## Reflection: The threat of Global Warming

**A note from Ian:** *Apologies for being a little theological, but from time to time we need some big picture thinking. You'll notice there are no stand-alone lectionary scripture readings because I have used many scripture references in the course of the reflection. Also to note is that I'm no authority or example in the subject of ecology. While I've appreciated nature and the environment, to my shame I've done little to care and protect it. One further comment. I'm not interested in arguing the degree of human influence on global warming. That is like refusing the life jacket because it's the wrong colour, as the ship goes down!*

### Introduction

**Code red!** We should be acting like our house is on fire, but we are behaving like the proverbial frog in slowly heating water. We seem to be in denial of what's happening. We just let life go on with only a vague sense of the need to do something. No number of extreme weather events seem to move us. Fires, floods, heat waves, water and food scarcity, displaced migrants and it's only going to become much worse.

Science is telling us that we are facing a stark choice - We either preserve 'the wonderful world' of nature or generate a 'waste world' where increasing extinction of species is happening at great speed and threatens our own human survival going forward.

The environment is under threat, and this must not just be the concern of the Greens! I dare to suggest that if God has a favourite colour, I think it's green! There's so much of it. But on that logic God must support the National Party as there's lots of blue sky, so that's a problem!

It is said that the biggest challenge to our survival is not the terrorist threat or even another world war. It is an ecological crisis. The destruction of planet earth. One eminent writer has called this the 'extinction crisis'. It's not in my

nature to be a prophet of doom but given such realities, it seems the likely outcome!

**The list is daunting!** *Pollution, deforestation, acidic rain, the loss of fertile land mass to encroaching desert, species extinction, ozone depletion, dead zones in the ocean, plastic and chemical runoff choking our oceans and rivers, global warming, mass displacement of people, over population. Recent flooding events in many parts of the world illustrate what is predicted to be increases in extreme weather events. The apocalyptic cloud of our age is an ecological one!*

### **The prophetic text of Isaiah 24 vividly portrays this possibility**

*"And so the land will dry up, and everything that lives on it will die. All the animals and birds, and even the fish will die". Hosea 4:3*

*"Behold the Lord will lay waste the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants. . . . The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled; . . . The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for we have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the Genesis covenant." Isaiah 24: 1-5*

According to some ecology scientists we are facing some grim realities. Because of our behaviour our days are numbered. We do well to remember that the earth was nurturing and sustaining life long, long before our arrival and if we become a species that is destructive, then the earth will deal with us, by protecting itself and terminating our species. We will face extinction!

One commentator in a provocative article entitled 'Humans as Cancer' argues that we are feeding off other species. This is the way a cancerous tumour increases its size within living organisms. Are humans becoming a form of planetary cancer? Certainly, much of our behaviour supports the analogy.

Well, this is all very bleak and disturbing but perhaps there remains another possibility. Listen to Isaiah and Paul .....

**Isaiah 43:16-19 (NIV):** *This is what the Lord says—he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. **See, I am doing a new thing!** Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. God is always doing a new thing. **'Behold, I make all things new'**.*

**Isaiah 65: 17 (NIV):** *See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create .....*

**2 Corinthians 5:17-20 (KJV):** *"Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new".*

In the light of this 'new life' possibility, I believe we need to establish three things ...

## **1. Establish a sound theological 'worldview' which I would argue is 'an incarnation world view'**

Global warming is not the end, but the sooner we act the more human misery and the suffering of God we can prevent. The challenge for us is to have a 'worldview' that sees planet earth as God's creation and with humankind responsibility for its care. We need to recognise that the earth doesn't belong to us, we belong to the earth along with all the other creatures and species. We need to accept that we are part of creation and made of the same 'Garden of Eden dirt' as every other species. God is not going to save us from ourselves. God has conferred on us the status of being 'co-creators' to achieve the divine purposes. We have a sacred responsibility to honour and if we fail then that would be the end of the human experiment on earth as we know it.

The book of Genesis asserts that the dirt of which all creation and we are made **is sacred and in-breathed by God**. Ecological issues are religious issues, environmental issues are spiritual issues.

The Nicene Creed states that Jesus is fully God and fully human. We might say Jesus is fully Spirit and fully dust. Jesus, as God incarnate, is God's Spirit embodied in dust. Jesus is 'God dust' even as we are, because as the Genesis account says, ***'Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life'. (Genesis 2:7)***.

Dividing the body from the soul has been a serious failure of modern evangelical Christianity. Doing this has allowed us to depreciate or separate the body and material aspects of life from the spiritual, including the exploitation of nature which perhaps is the ultimate blasphemy - the exportation of God's body.

Greek Orthodox theologian Philip Sherrard says, 'Creation is nothing less than the manifestation of God's hidden being'.

Theologian Sally McFague describes the natural world as 'the Body of God' and deserving of respect and reverence. Therefore, how we treat creation is how we treat God - a very disturbing thought!

John of Damascus the 18th Century poet and artist observed that 'the earth is the living face of God'. Jesus spoke about 'as often as we give a cup of cold water to the least of these, you do it unto me'. The New Testament speaks about finding Christ in our neighbour and the stranger and only when we do, will we see the face of God in others and in the very image of God in nature.

As Paul states: *"Ever since God created the world, his invisible qualities, both his eternal power and his divine nature, have been clearly seen; they are perceived in the things that God has made"*. Romans 1:20 (GNB)

## **2. Establish a sound theological view of the 'Church'**

We have done ourselves a grave disservice by coming to believe the physical Church is a sacred place while the world is not. The idea of the 'Holy' being contained in buildings is totally incompatible with scripture as obviously God is present everywhere to hear our prayers. Yet we too easily confine the 'Divine

Presence' just to dedicated Cathedrals, Temples, Gurdwaras, Shrines and Churches.

We need to reflect on Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple all those 1000's of years ago, **"Behold the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee: how much less this house that I have built." (1 Kings 8:27).**

Paul's comments to the Athenians (Acts 17:24,25,28) are also very pertinent.... *"God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; .....For in him we live, and move, and have our being".*

Ever since the missionary movement of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century the western church has walked hand in glove with the colonizers and merchants and too often assumed their causes were the same. Sadly, Christian churches and organisations to this day largely remain indifferent to the rape and plunder of the world's resources and indigenous cultures. Further we conveniently turn a blind eye to the military/industrial/consumer complex that exploits and depletes the precious natural resources of creation. Too much modern Christianity has become obsessed with getting weak souls to heaven while standing by as our capitalistic behaviour destroys the natural beauty and health of the creation.

### **3. Establish a sound 'working theology'**

Based on all this, what can we do? At our home group last month, we considered these matters. Braid challenged us, 'well what are going to do about it?' That's the challenge that we all must face. We might also ask what on earth is our generation visiting on our children and subsequent generations?

Perhaps we are just overwhelmed with the complexity of it all, it's just too much to think about or is it that we are paralyzed with inertia or worse the sin of apathy! Aquinas said inertia is **'the lack of energy to begin new things'** and this is where the gospel and our faith can make the difference. As we've seen, Isaiah, Jeremiah and St Paul were convinced that there is hope even though it will be through great struggle and suffering - because 'God is always doing a new thing'.

*"For we know that up to the present time all of creation groans with pain, like the pain of childbirth. But it is not just creation alone which groans; we who have the Spirit as the first of God's gifts also groan within ourselves as we wait for God to make us his children and set our whole being free."* Romans 8:22, 23

The whole thrust of the prophets and indeed the New Testament writers is that the world will not end in some cataclysmic defeat by evil, but rather "in joy". They argue that human history is not an end in itself but is a stage towards a new heaven and a new earth. So, when everything seems out of control and beyond us, God remains committed to realizing the divine purpose. This of course does not mean we sit back and do nothing. Jesus enjoins us to care for the widows, orphans, and strangers and to work to overcome corrupt

and inequitable justice and economic systems. We must become active co-workers in safeguarding the planet on which we and all life depend.

**We all can do something!** I like the story about Martin Luther who was asked what he should do if he knew the world was going to end tomorrow. He said he'd go out and plant a tree! He believed the end of time was up to God and so he still needed to live responsibly on earth. He was absolutely sure that the new heaven and the earth would descend from heaven. We are not going there; it is coming here! While this gives hope it also requires work!

Remember Bill Duncan's message when he spoke of some of the significant examples of change that have been inspired by this congregation. I think of our efforts to address the plight of migrant workers in the Aged Care industry. You'll remember we established a joint committee with reps from our church, St Andrews Village, and the Salvation Army Social Policy Unit. We functioned for 3 years and produced research and advocacy reports which, taken with other efforts, resulted in substantial government policy change for the good.

Can I suggest we think about forming a '**SHCC environmental action group**' or some such way of compelling us to go beyond just words of concern and wringing of hands, to doing something practical and effective to show we care about the biggest issue facing human survival on the planet.

**In conclusion let us affirm that .....**

- God loves the creation, and that all life is sacred.
- We actively love and care about nature in all its wonderful diversity - to see and treat the earth as our 'neighbour'.
- We establish a clear link and working theology between our faith and the natural world as gifted by God our Creator. Have a social ethic informed by eco-justice, not based on more materialism but sharing and caring.
- We become co-workers in creation - and follow the example of modern-day prophets like 'Sir Richard Attenborough' who shows the way in developing our appreciation and care for nature.
- We promote the new world order! (the Kingdom of God) - if we don't, who will?
- We pray to be moved from any apathy or neglect to an active compassion for all species.

**Conclusion:** It is instructive to take a lead from people like Sir Richard Attenborough and from Biblical prophets. Also, what could have been more bleak, hopeless, and oppressive than the situation of occupied Palestine at the time of Christ. Yet, something momentous and profoundly ordinary happened. Jesus was born bringing light and hope of a promised future. Christ born in us, can help us do the same and become hope to every species of life so that the whole of creation can flourish and glorify its maker and redeemer. It's now our turn to embody the petition we so often pray, 'Your Kingdom come'.

## **Prayer for our earth**

E te Atua kaha rawa

Please look upon the people who are moving because of all the natural disasters, lands that are sinking into the sea and please look after people who are suffering from extreme weather events.

Help those families especially as they are finding life hard.

Our prayer is especially for all people to be safe every day, just like the life we are living now.

I ask you Father, to save people from all disasters. Amen.

*Patricia Lotulelei, Year 6 St Anne's Catholic School, Manurewa*

## **Hymn**

Touch the earth lightly, use the earth gently,  
Nourish the life of the world in our care,  
gift of great wonder, ours to surrender,  
trust for the children tomorrow will bear.

We who endanger, who create hunger,  
agents of death for all creatures that live,  
we who would foster clouds of disaster –  
God of our planet, forestall and forgive.

Let there be greening, birth from the burning,  
water that blesses and air that is sweet,  
health in God's garden, hope in God's children,  
regeneration that peace will complete.

God of all living, God of all loving,  
God of the seedling, the snow and the sun,  
teach us deflect us, Christ reconnect us,  
using us gently, and making us one.

*Shirley Erena Murray*

## **Benediction**

The news is that God's wind is blowing.  
It may be a breeze that cools and comforts.  
It may be a gust that summons you to notice.

It may be a storm that blows you where you have never been before.

Whatever the wind is in your life, pay attention to it ...

And the blessing of Father, Son and Spirit will always be with you. Amen



*'Blown by God toward Newness' - by Walter Brueggemann*