

Genesis 1:1- 2:3

Roams 8:18-25

Matthew 6:25-end

A priest friend of mine once asked a group of Christians at a conference to talk about the situations and times when they felt closest to God. Those moment when they felt that they were so close to God that they could almost touch him. Those “thin” times and “thin places” where God seemed to be all around them –where the boundaries between earth and heaven seemed to fade.

Almost without exception the response was something to do with being outside. On the hills; by the sea; in the country; looking at the birds; staring up at the night sky; studying the beauty of a leaf; seeing the petals of a flower open; watching a new born lamb .

Which isn't altogether surprising because (as we have just heard in the wonderful creation story from Genesis chapter 1 – the very first words in scripture) the world around us has God stamped all over it and all through it. Like a piece of seaside rock. But it does beg the question of why we most often ask people to gather together inside buildings to worship God. But that's another thought for another sermon.

But it also challenges us with another question – and one which is very pertinent at this time. Why have we as human beings treated the world around us with such disdain. Why have we been content to exploit it and abuse it; why have we been all too ready to destroy and pollute in the name of progress. And, perhaps even more importantly, why do we continue to do so even though we are warned of the consequences of things like climate change and plastic pollution.

Maybe its down to the way we interpret those words in Genesis

²⁶ Then God said, 'Let us make humankind^[c] in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth,^[d] and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'

Dominion = there for us to use = there for us to control = exploitation and carelessness and disregard

But what about this interpretation of the same passage in The Message – a paraphrase of the Bible in modern language that attempts to get to the meaning of phrases rather than a word for word translation

*God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them
reflecting our nature
So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,
the birds in the air, the cattle,
And, yes, Earth itself,
and every animal that moves on the face of Earth."*

Now that places a very different emphasis on things. One that is very much in keeping with the tune of the times in which we live. Be responsible for. Care for. Look after. Treasure.

Or perhaps our disregard for the creation is down to the perception we might have that the whole Bible message is about eternity and not this world. Paul himself talks of the dangers of "the flesh" and urges us to concentrate on spiritual things. He says that our true citizenship is in heaven, and that our concerns should be those of eternity rather than material.

And yet this doesn't seem to tally with the emphasis Jesus placed on this world. In today's gospel reading he talks of God's concern for all of creation – birds, plants and humans.

Elsewhere the gospels talk of a Jesus who was concerned about this world. Concerned about the sick, the poor, the outcast. He was concerned about those who had little, and vexed by those who had much. He warned the rich that much would be expected of them; that they had responsibilities as well as benefits. You can't imagine him turning round to the leper and saying - never mind, once you are in heaven it will all be OK. He wouldn't have told the beggar that the fact he was hungry didn't matter – that what mattered was the world to come.

He addressed the way people lived in this world. Asking people to look at themselves and repent to follow God's way, to look out for others and make these other people's lives better. It was about the here and now not the world to come.

Or we might think that creation is unimportant because of what we read in Romans today – a passage that talks of Paul's concern for the world to come and not the material world - *the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us*

But in fact this passage illustrates well the glorious truth that the creation will be released from all the pain and the suffering and be restored. It will be set free and obtain the freedom it was always meant to have. That it shows God's concern for the whole of creation that he wants to redeem and restore it. Its not just to be discarded, but is to be part of the future just as it is part of the past and the present.

So I believe the Bible paints a picture that this world is important because God created it. That he entrusted it to our care; that he is still wanting the best for it; that he still wants us to look after it, and that one day it will be restored to its glory – the new (new as in renewed and restored) heaven and earth spoken about in Revelation. That the eternity spoken of is much more physical that we might have imagined. That the material and physical is part of Gods plan for the future.

Yesterday at Messy Church we were thinking about this. Looking at various aspects of the world around us and how we can care for it more carefully.

We made windmills; mobiles of birds and bees, planted seeds, baked our own bread, made bird feeders and – as you can see – looked at how we might reduce our carbon footprint

We talked about reuse and recycling; about our use of plastics, about our use of energy; about the way we care for the birds and the insects, the trees and the forests. We could have spoken about what we eat – many people have found that the largest item in their carbon footprint is their diet. Meat and dairy. We could have talked about our love for things – our accumulation of more and more things that fill our homes and use up resources. We could have spoken about all kinds of things

And as a Parish we are signing up to the eco church movement. A small working group met on Thursday to take some of these ideas forward in terms of our buildings, our churchyard/garden, our use of chemicals in cleaning materials etc etc. A couple of concrete ideas - Lent toilet twinning; recipes

And other Small things we can do - unplug, less in kettles. More jumpers. Don't heat all rooms. Walk where we can. Buy locally produced food and reduce food miles.

In lent we are using the Church of England resource "Care for Gods creation"

(in fact we gave the childrens version to all our messy Church families yesterday)

Each day through lent it gives a thought and a suggestion for practical action. Our lent groups will be based around this.– the booklets will be available to take next week (£1.50 each). We hope that many will take the booklet or download the app. Also please come to the groups on Wednesday afternoon or Thursday evenings

Next month at the ST Johns coffee morning we are thinking about caring from the environment. One of my friends Harry who does a lot of work in the churchyard in Tanworth in Arden is coming to share some ideas of what we can do at St Johns and st James. You might even pick up some tips if what you can do in your garden to encourage wildlife.

On Wednesday the Church of England general synod talked about similar issues and they resolved to aim to become carbon neutral by 2030. That's a tall order and will radically change the way we do things.

As churches and as individuals we need to look to using renewable energy, to cutting down on plastics and paper, to using our gardens and churchyards to promote the environment and to do much more besides.

The temptation for us oldies is to say it won't matter to us and that there's no need for us to worry – the world will see us out (we might even try to justify that from Jesus' words in the gospel passage). But we need to think about our children and grandchildren and great grandchildren.

What kind of world, what kind of climate, what kind of nature are we handing on to them – and what can we do to make it the best it can be? How can we demonstrate our responsible caring for the created world.; how can we see our care for the creation as part of our response to God and worship of God.

These are the questions we are seeking to answer as we move down this path; as we read and talk and study through Lent and as we take practical steps now and beyond. For me this is exciting and challenging – I hope it is for you too.

Have a word with Kate , Chris Eggleston, Kate C, Chris Speakman or Jill Abbey