

## God's Creation

Genesis 1:1- 2:3

Roams 8:18-25

Matthew 6:25-end

I suspect we have all been deeply saddened and shocked this week by images from Turkey and Syria of the after-effects of the earthquake. Saddened and shocked by the news of so many people dying and also still missing; saddened by the enormity of the suffering. Saddened that such things are out of our control.

And saddened and confused maybe by how all this doesn't fit well with the loving God in whom we believe and trust, nor with the picture of the beautiful creation we have just read about in Genesis 1 – the very first words in our Bibles – the creation that God looked at and saw that it was very good.

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 frolic in a field. Perhaps at times like those we don't think of the other side of creation – the earthquakes, floods or tsunamis that can cause so much destruction and pain.

Around us, though, we see a world that has God stamped all over it and all through it. Like a piece of seaside rock. We find the created world helps us to meet with God – which does beg the question of why we most often ask people to gather together inside buildings to worship God and is one of the reasons why we have introduced our Forest Church where we use the outside, the created world to help us worship.

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; to see how we have – sometimes inadvertently – caused so called natural disasters like floods and drought – to happen. And, perhaps even more importantly, why do we continue to do such

things 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<sup>[c]</sup> 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,<sup>[d]</sup> and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'*

Dominion gives the impression that the world is for us to use; for us to control which soon leads to 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.

When we look at the world we see that we as a human race have not cared for it well. Pollution; deforestation; extinction; climate change. We read about predictions of rise in sea levels, change in weather patterns, places and areas becoming inhabitable and we know in our heart of hearts that there has to be changes in the way we live. The difficulty is what can we realistically do.

And that is what we – as individuals and as a church - are trying to look at. Our churches have recently been awarded the silver award for our eco church activities and plans – a marker of the progress we have made on the journey. And also an acknowledgement that there is still a long way to go.

Kate, Linda and myself met this week with an engineer to talk about possibilities for heating this building when we have to replace the ageing gas boilers. Not just going for a like for like answer, but a solution that helps us on our eco journey – our

journey to net zero – to being carbon neutral, to being part of the solution rather than the problem.

The problems the human race – indeed all creation - faces are immense. Perhaps they cause you to be anxious or to worry about what kind of planet we are handing on to the next generations; how our children and grandchildren will live, what the world will be like. Perhaps too the earthquake makes us worry about things way beyond our control. The dangers that are all around us.

But the gospel passage we heard today tells us not to worry ....

We hear the words of Jesus – Do not worry. Your father knows what you need. Don't worry.

But worry is part of our everyday life.

Worry about having too much or too little to do

Worry about our health

Worry about our family

Worry about the cost of living

Worry about the state of the country

Worry about the war in Ukraine

Worry about the earthquake in Turkey and Syria

Worry about climate change

So how do we respond to those words of Jesus?

How can we tell people who don't know where their next meal is coming from not to worry?

How can we tell the mother whose child is dying of cancer not to worry?

How can we tell people who are living in war zones not to worry?

How can we tell those in Turkey who are waiting for news of family or friends caught up in the earthquake not to worry?

How can we tell those people living on Pacific Islands whose very home is threatened by rising sea levels not to worry?

How can we stop ourselves from worrying as Jesus urges?

The passage is all part of what Jesus says about living God's way. Being part of the Kingdom of God. Making the most of what we have and who we are as God wants us to. To live now, not just for ourselves but for those around us. To focus on what

we can do, what we can effect rather than what we can't.

And so in relation to the climate crisis, for example, this means not wringing our hands in anxious despair because the problem all seems so huge. Rather, it means thinking about what we can do – precisely the kinds of things our eco-group have been suggesting over the months. Thinking of how we can be part of the solution, not just the problem. The way we can change our lives; the ways we can help influence others to change theirs and the things we can do to affect Government policy.

And perhaps the same applies to other issues.

Earthquakes are beyond our control. They are to do with the movement of tectonic plates far below the earth's surface – things I can hardly comprehend let alone change. **But what I can do is contribute towards the relief work. The DEC has just launched an appeal. There is an opportunity today to give towards that.**

Food poverty – its not within our remit to solve the question of such poverty but we can donate to the foodbank and campaign for a fairer society. We can turn worry into action – that is what Jesus would have done and what he is advocating here with the do not worry command.

And we can see how Paul in the passage from the letter to the Romans paints the same kind of picture.

Creation is in a mess he says – we might say the mess is greater now than then. It is groaning (which perhaps brings up the image of the tectonic plates moving) as it waits – as Paul says - for the children of God to be revealed. Perhaps there is something here about creation waiting for people like you and me to start living as Jesus tells us, to start living God's way. Waiting for people like us to make a difference, to start doing rather than worrying.

So three interesting readings today which work together to encourage us to reflect on the goodness and Godliness of the created world; to grieve at the damage that we as humans have caused to the world and to the way we live; to focus on what we can do rather than what we can't do and to live in God's way rather than questioning why things aren't as we would want them to be.

And it may be of course that the things we decide to do, that are possible for us to do are not much different from what other people of good will – of other faith or of none – might do. But there may well be things that are distinctively Christian

responses. And one could be prayer. All of us I am sure can find an extra moment to pray. When something troubles us, begins to worry us – whether it is personal or global – we can turn that worry not just to action but also to prayer. Whenever or wherever. Be it in the middle of a sleepless night or the heart of a busy day. Be it alone or with others we can pray – and as we pray who knows – we may hear the voice of God prompting us to an action we had never thought of taking.