

SKY SUNDAY –notes for a sermon

17 September 2006

What contrasts we have in the readings today, from darkness to celebration, from desolation to praise, concluding with Jesus' death – and darkness over the whole land.

I've spent a lot of time this week, following viewing Al Gore's film "An Inconvenient Truth" last Sunday, and in preparing for today, reflecting on our environment. I've been reading the comments on climate change in the paper, including the graphic headlines on the threat to the snowfields in yesterday's Canberra Times.

In my state of heightened awareness, on Thursday, I set out on foot to an appointment at Tilley's..... about 500 metres down the road, I realised I had not allowed myself enough time to get there. I hurried back, determined to ride my bike. I checked the tyres – they were a bit flat. Not deterred, out came the pump a new pumpbut instead of putting air in, I managed to let all the air out! So, frustrated in my attempts to be ecologically sound – and out of time – I drove to Tilleys!! And home again oh well

I made up for it on my day off on Friday, cycling into Civic and walking around the lake

It is good to go at a slower pace, but it takes some planning – it feels good to care for myself and the environment – to smell the flowers, to notice the birds, to see the clouds and, maybe it makes a tiny difference. It is amazing that it is the scientific imperative that drives me to action – rather than God's love – this shows how disconnected I have become from my environment

From an article by Linda Chapman entitled "Love, Power, Awareness and Creation" published in Anglican News.

Linda Chapman writes, rather poignantly in light of recent events:
"One morning recently whilst swimming in shallow, still ocean water I noticed ahead of me a shadow and, supposing it to be seaweed, I kept swimming. The 'weed' turned out to be a huge sting ray. Now I know that the barb of a sting ray is extremely painful and in some cases life threatening. Here was this huge ray only inches under me yet, in those first seconds of recognizing it, a choice between love and fear seemed to happen within me. The experience of such physical closeness to this gracious creature was one of pure gift. For a moment the sting ray remained where it was, then it slowly moved away."

In reflecting on this experience, Linda says, "I was struck by the sense of the silent movement of this beautiful creature towards me whilst I remained unaware of it until it was right underneath me. I was surprised by the close encounter, having entered the water with no expectation of such a meeting or indeed awareness of the presence of the sting ray. But I was also touched by the intimacy of the encounter and a powerful sense of love for this sea

dweller. I began to reflect on awareness, love and power in our relationship with creation.

You can show your great power any time you wish, and no one can stand against it. In your sight the whole world is a grain of sand, a drop of dew on the ground in the morning you love everything that exists: you do not despise anything that you have made. If you had not liked it you would not have made it in the first place.

The words of Wisdom from the Old Testament (above) speak of the immensity of both God and the created cosmos. We are indeed like a grain of sand in the face of such immensity and yet as the writer of Wisdom says we are sustained by the love of the Creator. God's love for everything that exists forms the basis of a Christian ecological ethic of living. We may not yet be capable of such a love or of seeing the whole world in a grain of sand yet we are called to grow towards such love and awareness.

The Wisdom writer also speaks of great power. What then is the relationship between love and power and how do we understand these in our own relationship with God's creation and the, often unseen, processes of nature?

From processes in the ozone layer that protect us from UV radiation, to the network of biochemical activities found inside each cell in our bodies, we are surrounded by unseen processes and activities that maintain us and the world in which we live. Such complexity in creation is outside our usual sphere of awareness. Yet, as we go about our day-to-day activities, these processes of creation go on in an invisible life-giving dance. The power inherent in this activity, given by God the Creator, is indeed awesome.

Humanity, however, often misappropriates power in life-denying ways. This abuse of power is evidenced by such things as our voracious appetite for often unnecessary consumer goods, over-reliance on fossil fuels as an energy source, cruelty to animals in the livestock trade, deforestation and resulting loss of habitat for non-human life and so on. We see creation as being human centred and therefore live as though creation is here to serve us. We live as though we have no dependence on other life in the whole earth community; as though we are sufficient to ourselves and are entitled to exert power in whatever way we like over other life.

As Christians, we say that we are here to serve God; that our power is only in God. To really live out such a belief we must ask ourselves who, in reality, do we serve? Surely, if we answer by saying we serve God, then we must also serve God's creation. If we say, along with the Wisdom writer, 'You love everything that exists' then surely we too must at least attempt to love 'everything that exists'. This love will recognize not only our own interdependence with all creation but will also desire the integrity and fulfilment of all creation.

The power of geological events such as earthquakes and tsunamis can be seriously destructive and of a kind that we humans cannot 'stand against'.

Such destructive power is part of the evolutionary process. The power of God however, is the power to love even in the midst of destruction and at times when that love may seem invisible to us. It is the power of love that we know in the reality of Christ on the cross and the earth responds 'when it was noon, darkness came over all the land until three in the afternoon', Mk15:33.

We human beings have been gifted with great love and power even though this often seems hidden or outside our usual awareness. But the love and power with which we have been gifted is divine in origin. The whole earth community, of which we are a part, and with whom we have interdependence is suffering. For too long we have used our power to exploit creation. Many Christians today however are recognizing the call to care for creation. Such caring begins with awareness, which precedes action. We can grow in our awareness of the life process and our part in the dance of life. We can learn to use our power in the truly Christian way that Christ shows; use not for power over, but for the purposes of love. Let us always live in gratitude for the unseen forces of nature that sustain us, as we are also mindful of the ways in which humanity debilitates nature. Our true power may indeed be in our capacity for co-creativity with God. I pray that we may grow in the capacity to 'love everything that exists' and act for the integrity of creation."

Julien of Norwich (in 'Revelations of Divine Love' Ch 5) reflects on her vision: 'And [God] showed me a little thing, the size of a hazelnut, on the palm of my hand, round like a ball. I looked at it thoughtfully and wondered, 'What is this?' and the answer came, 'It is all that is made'. I marvelled that it continued to exist and did not suddenly disintegrate; it was so small. And again my mind supplied the answer, 'It exists, both new and forever, because God loves it.'

Bishop George in his address to Synod (speaking of the millennium goal of environmental sustainability) says:

"'The environment' is the term we use for the space in which we live – no more no less. (A home in which there is constant squabbling between the adults is an 'unhappy environment' in which to bring up children).

The environment in its purest sense is not a description of anything tangible, it is not a description of water, or trees, or warmth, although it of course, includes all these things, it is the space given to all living things to evolve, flourish and ultimately die; ... (it is if you like, a description of what God was doing on the first three days of creation)."

Bishop George suggests that we must place far greater value on the space in which we live and goes on 'One of the obvious and necessary ways of doing this is to put a price on carbon He then goes on to speak about climate change and energy and the impact on the space in which we live – you can find his words on the diocesan web site..... What underlies this response to our environment?

I am conscious of the:

- water I use
- the energy - electricity, petrol that supports me

I pledge to:

- recycle
- reuse
- cut down

and lobby the Government on

climate change

it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Phil 2:13

God loves us

and all creation.