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Rachel Mash

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World Environment Day

Rachel Mash¹

The theme for World Environment Day this year is, 'Time for Nature,' looking at the role of nature in providing the essential infrastructure that supports life on Earth. And so our wonderful first lesson from Genesis reminds us of the wonder of nature. .

let the land burst forth with every sort of seed bearing plant- the seeds will produce the fruit from which they came. Let the waters swarm with fish, let the fish multiply and fill the oceans" God made all sorts of wild animals, livestock and small animals each able to reproduce more of this own kind, and God saw that it was *good*.

We are very privileged in our generation to be able to see incredible videos from Planet Earth and National Geographic which show us this incredible diversity of life – this wonder of creation. In these verses we see how plants, fish and animals were all designed to thrive, to reproduce and to replicate.

And yet with great sorrow we read that the web of life on which we depend is unravelling. Our ecosystems provide us with clean air, fresh water, food, and medicine and they are being destroyed due to land loss and pollution. Insects, for example, play an essential role in pollinating flowering plants — a third of the food we eat depends on animal pollinators. Their population is dropping rapidly.

So what does our faith have to do with the protection of biodiversity? We are celebrating Trinity Sunday and are reminded that the Trinity is the heart of our faith – we pray in the name of God the Father, God the son and God the holy spirit. We become part of the family of God through baptism in the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

So what does the Trinity teach us about caring for this beautiful planet that was given into our care.? we have tended to relegate the Creation story to a nice Sunday school tale. The reality is that the church has focused very much on the person of Jesus Christ, and God the father who is creator, God the Spirit have often been given less emphasis. And yet if we turn to our first reading – Genesis 1 we find that they are all present.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Here we see God the Father, who Created the heavens and the earth , We also see that the Spirit of God was present, hovering over the surface of the deep – yet where was the Christ? Was he not present, did he only appear later as a baby in Bethlehem? In John 1 we read those famous words - In the beginning was the word - through him all things were made. Christ was present at the beginning of Creation and through Christ all things were made.

We often talk of Jesus Christ as if that is his surname, but Christ is a title - we should speak of Jesus the christ. The christ who was present at the start of creation came down to

¹ Dr Rachel Mash, Green Anglicans

be born as tiny baby Jesus in insignificant little Bethlehem. The birth of the Christ as a tiny human baby in Bethlehem is amazing - God steps down into humanity – I love that chorus that says - “Light of the world you came down into darkness

And what did Jesus the Christ do, he healed the sick , he even healed nature – we see him calming the storm – he fed the hungry - Jesus valued the crops on which humans depend for food, he preached about the sowers and the seed – he made bread a sacrament, he loved to worship in nature, most of his preaching and his parable included images from nature. He saw the fingerprint of God in all of nature.

The Bible affirms some very important things about the role of Christ at Creation. Colossians 1 ;15-20 affirms this “ he is the image of the invisible God the firstborn over all creation. And then v 16 all things were created by him and for him. In verse 17 we read that “he is before all things and in him all things hold together, In him all things hold together.”

Wow let us unpack this a little.

All things were created for him. If all things were created for Christ, we cannot worship Jesus and forget the world that he created, that he loved and that was created for him. So what does this have to do with our faith in v17 in Christ all things hold together. We are part of the web of life – the earth will survive with out us, we cannot survive without the earth. We have taken Christ out of Creation, the web of life is falling apart because we now make all our decision based on economic ones, rather than on protecting the web of life.

Rather than putting Christ back into Christmas, let us put Christ back into Creation- Creation was made by him and for him, and in him all things hold together.” Our gospel reading is the Great Commission – we have received the holy spirit and now we are called to go out into the world and make disciples. What does that mean? Matthew was probably composed in Antioch, the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire. Sanitation and running water was luxury for the rich. For the majority poor, sewers were open pits, human corpses would be abandoned. Soap hadn’t been invented yet. At that time two great epidemics swept the western world (probably Small pox and measles) The plague of Galen in 165 wiped out may a quarter of the population, and in 251 another epidemic swept the Empire – in Rome alone 5000 people per

What was response of Christians? We read that due to the heroic nursing efforts of Christians, many survived. Pagans threw the sick bodies from them, fearing disease. What was new in Christianity was the linking of a social response to religious ethic. (In Roman religion you went to the temple to worship god and take your sacrifice- In Christianity you serve your neighbour).

Matt 25: 31-46 Did you help the sick, did you feed the hungry? Christians had a better mutual support system and this also led to higher rates of survival. They fed the hungry, looked after the sick. The question is- at this time of COVID19 : are we creating a circle of care, a circle of difference? Or have we turned again to the Roman type of worship – where we go to the temple to worship our Lord Jesus Christ rather than following him?’ Is our focus on returning to worship in out temples or it it on serving our neighbour?

The gospel reading calls us to go and make disciples – a disciple is someone who is a follower of Jesus Christ. Someone who cares passionately for the needs of his or her neighbour, someone who knows that the web of life was created by and for Christ. As we love our neighbours in this period of COVID-19 let us follow Christ and bring the the good news

of kingdom , we must call for clean water and sanitation, let us take the good news that no one deserves to live in urban misery with rubbish lying everywhere . Let us take the good news that God has given us the earth to grow healthy food in our communities. When we say Jesus is Lord, we affirm that Jesus is Lord of all of creation, let us put the Christ back into the heart of creation, the heart of the web of life

Amen