

Followers Of The Way

Ancient Discipleship For Modern Christians

“Celebrate and care for creation”

Paddy Gleave

Psalm 19. All heaven declares God's glory

Good morning. We are part way through a series of talks about Followers of the Way – exploring the insights of those who came before us regarding what it is to follow Jesus. Homegroups are also tracking this via a book called “Followers of the Way”. Last Sunday Tom Yacomeni talked on Living as simply as possible. Today we are looking at the theme Celebrate and Care for Creation. It is also fittingly Harvest Festival Today!

So, to kick off I have a quiz challenge for you all. Let's have two teams. I will ask a question, have a chat and then nominate someone to give your answer.

If your blood vessels were laid end to end how long would they be (approximate 100k miles or 4 times round earths equator

How long would it take to fly a plane to Pluto (assume you could fly a plane in space) – 800 years!

What is the ratio of human cells to bacteria cells in your body (10 times more).

How much does a tea spoon of a neutron star weigh? Trillion kilograms more than the weight of the entire human population

How many pencils could you make from an average sized tree – 170,000

The holy spirit likes to go under the skin of us in terms of what motivates our actions and what the patterns in our minds are. So, the grid in our mind or lens through which we look through and discern and understand reality matters when it comes to thinking about creation and what it is to be human beings as part of creation.

In my early 20s I went on a Christian relief expedition to a village in the foothills on the Himalayas – on the Tibet/China border. On the way there we stopped for a couple of days at a city called Chengdu. While we were there I into the centre. A team interpreters gave me the hotel card and told me to simply show this to a taxi drive to get back. SO far so good. When it came to returning I put my hand up to stop a taxi and the driver simply drove by without stopping. I

didn't know what to do. No-one spoke English, the street maps were in Chinese, the phone box had Chinese characters for numbers. I was all at sea – I did not understand. My grid through which I looked at reality was inadequate to make sense of where I was, what I could do and where I could go.

So our metaphorical spectacles shape how we see reality and ourselves. The Holy Spirit reshapes these spectacles to help us see the world more like he does and in turn to give us wisdom as we look to make decisions and live out our lives. This is important when it comes to how we think about creation and our role as humans. Without this transforming we will struggle.

The theologian N T Wright shows that Christians in the West are susceptible to epicurean and platonic thinking. Platonic thinking sees the material world as rather shabby but there is another world of ideas which is more real or pure, So, I can see a table here but the real table is the idea of the table. Christians can be deceived by this – we see in Paul's letters him combating Gnostic thinking where the material world was seen as bad and the spiritual (which only an enlightened few had access to) as good – almost that we need to escape earth and go to heaven. Despite his best efforts this type of thinking crept into the minds of Christians over the centuries and indeed into the present. Epicurean thinking leads to dualism – seeing the spiritual as distant and somewhere else separate from the material. If there are God's they are long way off – up there somewhere and are not interested in the physical world which ticks on like a clock under its own steam.

We are subtly influenced by this – perhaps we see creation as not important as it is physical and our destination is going to heaven. We might think that creation is separate from us, whose destiny is to be consigned to the dustbin so we might not care too much about how it looks. We might consider ourselves as somehow distinct from creation so we can exploit it in whatever way we desire – take on our own terms. We might also see God as a long way off and not interested in us.

The bible challenges this – in the early chapters of Genesis at the end of each day of creation God declares it tov – translated as good. On the end of the 6th day God says that all things are tov tov – basically good good! There is an ordering pattern in Genesis – we see Psalm 19 rifting of this with emphasis on the sky and heavens showing God's glory. Furthermore, on in Deuteronomy we see this ordering pattern again regarding the construction of the meeting tent the Israelites where God came to reside. The theologian John Walton shows

that this temple picture helps us to see that Genesis shows the universe as a temple where God comes to reside. We will come back to this. So, whatever the problems we have in creation now – the reality of death, the difficulties in growing plants the challenge of making wise decisions - it is not shabby, not second rate. God is not distant but he is involved and imminent with creation (as well as being distinct from it). As NT Wright says creation and heaven are meant to go together and overlap – we see this in the tabernacle with the presence of God, in Solomon’s temple when God’s spirit comes on the temple and Jesus is also a walking mobile temple where the divine and the human come together. Creation is to be celebrated and enjoyed.

As Genesis goes on humans come on the scene. I’ve mentioned creation being a cosmic temple. All temples in the ancient world had an image of the deity in question. What is the image in the cosmic temple - humans themselves are the image bearers of God. We’re given a vocation to bring wise ordering to creation and to give worship back to God. Creation is full of potential – and part of the human vocation is to delight in creation and bring out that potential. For example, one apple tree will produce some fruit but with wise ordering an orchard can be grown and tended and give many, many apples. So, we should plant gardens be they actual gardens or metaphorical ones. Wherever you are there is potential in creation to bring out beautiful flowers, or encourage habitats. There is potential in people. You can look to grow and tend others to bring out good fruit in them.

However, we know this does not always work out right. Sometimes we deliberately do what is right in our own eyes – and look to take and convince ourselves that is morally right. Even when we have no ill intent we can still make bad decisions fracturing relationships with people and with creation. The story of the last 200 years is one of incredible progress but running through it is the idea that creation is something to be exploited, capitalised and used to deliver our desires. Our culture continually pumps into our brains the desire to acquire more, that there is not enough and we need to grab for ourselves - that we must be self reliant. How often have we desired something new – a new kitchen, a new car – to gain it and still not be satisfied. How much have we looked to build up substantial sums of money to give us a sense of security? How often do we believe the narrative that there is not enough so we need to keep it all ourselves. Genesis recognises these failings – it’s the fall – when humans look to define good and evil themselves, We know the long story through the bible as God enacts his rescue plan culminating in Jesus dying for

us and giving us access to new life and, crucially, via the spirit the renewing and transforming of our minds.

The glory of God that we see part of in the majesty of space dwelt with Jesus and through Jesus we can have access to all fullness now. Our time here is not about escaping this material world to heaven. It's about experience God's fullness now and embodying his Kingdom into this tov tov but hurting creation.

So, let's ask the Holy spirit to challenge us. To reveal aspects of your worldview and mindsets which distorts how you see creation and indeed how you see yourself as if we don't have the right spectacles we will be out on tune with God and his plans.

Let's celebrate and enjoy creation. Look through telescopes at stars, revel in the mountains, listen to the sea and rivers - put the mobile phone down and sit in a chair listening to birds, take photos, paint pictures. Plant and tend gardens. In all this recognise the gifts that God gives us through creation – not just food and water for our survival but so much more.

Finally, let's ask for Godly wisdom. We're called to wise ordering of creation – we're meant to be in community with it. We know about the challenges of our times climate change, loss of biodiversity, degradation of soils and the injustice of the poor suffering the most because of climate change. We need to be anointed by the Spirit to care for creation and each other as a foretaste of what is to come when God liberates creation from its groanings and makes all things new.