

Sermon for 23rd September 2018

Jeremiah 11.18-20; Psalm 54; James 3.1-12 and Mark 9.30-37.

You will remember at the beginning of this month I noted in the pew sheet message that our Archbishop Phillip has this year endorsed what is known and held annually in many Christian churches as the 'Season of Creation'. The season extends from September 1 through October 4, and during this time Christians are invited to pray and care for creation as one united global Christian family with one shared purpose. The theme for this year's celebration is "walking together," and as we do just that we notice in terms of biblical language the natural world plays a huge part in descriptive ways to highlight the point of a specific passage.

According to Genesis, right from the beginning out of the formless void in the power of the Spirit came the sky and the sea and the dry land. Then came the vegetation with all kinds of plants and seeds and fruits. And God saw that it was good.

In the psalms we hear of our natural world in terms that are full of beautiful and personal imagery. In psalm 8, the psalter writes *when I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established, what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?*

In psalm 98, let *the sea roar and all that fills it Let the floods clap their hands let the hills sing together for joy. And in proverbs: the root of the righteous bear's fruit. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life.* These are only a few examples.

As we know, Jesus in the parables used images of the natural world. The story of the mustard seed, and that of the wheat and the chaff - and, I believe, the most poignant of all, Jesus as the vine and we as the branches.

The reason the ways of the natural world are used so effectively as metaphors in teaching, is, I believe, because we are one with the natural world.

We are not separated from it in any way - and that is why when the old writers – those writers of the Old Testament and those of the New Testament, used metaphors to teach us spiritual truths we understood it - we totally got it, because we are part of it.

In the reading this morning from Jeremiah we hear descriptions of the natural world used to describe human intentions. *Let us destroy the tree and its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, so that his name will no longer be remembered.*

Jeremiah had been doing God's work and warning the people of the consequences of disobeying God's law. Some of the people had grown tired of his warnings and the way he continually exposed their failures, and they wanted him killed.

The metaphor makes the plotters intentions clear - Let us kill off Jeremiah and all that he has said and all that he prophesies and he and his prophesies will not be remembered by the people.

In the epistle this morning James is talking about faithfulness through a disciplined tongue and he uses imagery from the natural world to make his point.

James urges his listeners to tame the tongue for it *can be like a fire that sets ablaze a great forest. It can stain the whole body*, he says.

With it we can do good and bad things.

We can bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. To make his point about personal wholeness - that anything other is not the way of righteous in Christ, James simply asks his audience: *Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water/ Can a fig tree, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.*

The horrors of the destruction of the natural world happens I believe when we separate ourselves from that oneness with it, and see it for our own use and abuse. We do this of course at our own peril for when the natural world suffers, so to do we.

Now In the gospel reading Jesus highlights the way of humanity as created in God's image.

In the story Jesus takes the child - who, in the religious culture of the day, had little or no status in the household. Jesus holds the child in his arms and says, *whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.*

This for Jesus and for his followers is the natural order of what it is to be human, to welcome each other who are created in the image of God from the lowest status upwards.

So in the readings we hear the metaphoric use of the natural order of things in creation to clarify truths and in the gospel we hear the natural order of what it is to be human created in the image of God through Christ.

The world of nature and the world of humanity come together in the oneness of God's creation through Christ who was present in the beginning.

May we all be aware of and live in the assurance of this oneness.

Let us pray.