

Sermon for 15th After Trinity Yr B, Proper 18, second Sunday of Creation-tide

[Isaiah 35.4-7a](#)

[James 2.1-10,14-17](#)

[Mark 7.24-end](#)

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord our rock and our redeemer.

Well, here we are on the second Sunday of the Season of Creation, a season which starts on Sept 1st, Creation Day in the Orthodox calendar, and runs until October 4th, St Francis day (Incidentally, he's been proposed for the job as Patron Saint of Ecologists)

Emily got us off to a good start with our Worship last Sunday, and I'm not going to attempt to follow that, especially not as part of a 'traditional' sermon, except to invite you to look at our Creationtide Altar Frontal, which began to come together last Sunday.

Our relation to Creation has long been a troubled one, perhaps even predating the availability of written evidence .

We can speak as if 'first nation' people (To appropriate the name which is, I understand, in use in places such as Canada for the original inhabitants who were there before the colonists arrived) lived in some sort of magical 'ideal' relation with 'Nature'. A more cynical view is that there simply weren't enough of them to have much impact on their environment, and that they could always move on when the resources in their area ran out, or the herds moved on – and that brings us to one of the almost taboo subjects – human population. Our numbers have expanded greatly in recent time, and it's been estimated that if all of us were to enjoy (If 'enjoy' is the right word) a developed world lifestyle, we'd need more resources than this one planet can provide to sustain our lives. But we are in a bit of a problem here, for in many societies the only way of ensuring that you will be cared for in old age is to have a large family and hope that enough of them will survive and prosper to be able to provide and care for you as well as themselves, and their families. The nations which seem to escape this difficulty are possibly living off the production of other nations, or through the production and consumption of high value products and services.

Economists seem to have a built in belief that Growth is a natural state to be in. Can that be true on a finite planet with finite resources? Yes,perhaps we do seem to keep on finding new resources, but usually at greater cost either in the money taken to produce them or the environmental degradation produced. (Something which has been much in the news recently over issues such as Fracking, and including air quality on Kings Heath High street with the film 'Fighting For Air' , which you may have seen or heard of.)

But what has this to do with religion?

I've offered you for meditation a couple of quotes from a much longer article (copies available for study if you wish) which is often credited with initiating the debate over this issue, advancing the claim that our present situation was in large measure the result of (Western) Christian attitudes towards the created order, regarding it as fallen and open to exploitation. It's been claimed that before the middle 1960's the Churches had very little interest in this subject, being more concerned with the Spiritual realm than with the created

order. (perhaps it's worth taking a scientist's long view and observing that almost all that we regard as important in society is the fruit of the 10 000 years or so since the end of the last Ice Age – and I can remember a time when writers were not talking about Global Warming but about how we were overdue for the start of the next Ice Age!)

So what do our readings have to tell us which is relevant to this subject?

Well there's Lots of water in Isaiah – necessary, perhaps even to be welcomed, in an Arid environment It's been said that the two great issues in Israel/Palestine are land and water, and we have seen situations where rivers which pass through several countries are being dammed upstream depriving those downstream of water – and then we have situations, such as Kerala recently, where there has been too much water- a lot too much water. It seems that Climate change isn't simply producing hotter conditions, but making for more extreme events, so that we go from dire shortage to damaging excess in not much more than the blink of an eye.

James reminds us that we should show no partiality, that we do things for All, regardless of Status – indeed we live on one planet, and it's probably impossible to make changes which do not have far reaching effects on areas which appear unrelated. And it's worth remembering that the burden of these effects falls disproportionately on the poorest-nations, those least able to absorb the impact (and it's also true that even in wealthy nations, the poor take a disproportionate share of the loss and damage produced by environmental change – look at the effects of Hurricane Katrina in the USA 2005 and beyond)

James also makes one thing clear, that Faith which does not lead to works is not worth much – that we need to hear, see and speak (and do) what we believe, so if we really believe that we have a duty towards the weak, the oppressed, the marginalised, then we need to do something. It's no good telling them to care for themselves, we must support them, provide the means by which they, and we, can actually do something.

And, I would add, we must be prepared to modify our own lives, to reduce our impact on others. Something not easily done, which will be costly in the long run- and even then there is the question of whether we are too late to do anything effective – but try we must.

And in Mark's Gospel , where Jesus is coming in contact with people who are on the fringes , or outside the bounds of his community, it becomes clear that his ministry is for all, not just the Faithful – and if we are to model ourselves on our Lord, we should do likewise. Some would object that Jesus says nothing about the environment – (Though Josephus, the historian of much of the period, notes the shortage of wood in Israel) but he had more immediate injustices to address, and it is our privilege, indeed I'd put it stronger than that and call it a duty, to reinterpret the Gospel into our own time and context.

Perhaps that's in some part the message of the meeting David mentioned in the Notices - on 1st October, please come if you are able, and if possible bring a friend, to think about what story the Church should be telling to the world today and in the future.

However you think and react to these issues, they won't just 'go away' if we try to ignore them. And if I with advancing years, do not feel their effects, I'm sure my children and grandchildren will. Will they bless me or curse me? – that may be decided by what I do in what's left of my life.