

<b>Sunday 9 September 2018</b>		<b>SEASON OF CREATION</b>	
<b>Cathedral, Grahamstown</b>		<b>WATER</b>	
<b>7.30 &amp; 9.30 a.m.</b>			
	Ps 65:4-13	Rev 22:1-5	
		John 4:4-15	
<b>WATER THE SOURCE OF LIFE</b>			

Jesus said to the woman at the well, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” (Jn 4:13-14)

**SEASON OF CREATION**

We continue with our series and focus on the Season of Creation. For us as Christians, the Season of Creation is not simply a series of talks on the environment. Our starting point is that the world and all that there is, comes from the hand of God. Yes, there was a process of unfolding and development – the big bang, millions of years ago, the beginning of time, the slow evolution of the world into what we know today, the gradual formation of the continents, the great ice ages, the age of the dinosaurs, the early stone age, the tens of thousands of years of development that we glimpse in fossils and in giant rock formations.

All this, Christians believe, comes from the creative word and power of God. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen 1:1) With creation, including the creation of human beings, came stewardship – man was given the task of caring for the earth. Difficult words, often abused: “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and *subdue* it; and *have dominion* over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (Gen 1:28, italics added).

From dominion comes a theology of domination, which has been used to justify the abuse of the earth. “This ‘dominion/domination theology’ has been used to justify colonialism and rampant capitalism. It has allowed people to chop down tropical forests to grow soya for cattle feed and to pollute rivers with acid mine drainage as we dig for gold” – to do as we please with the world.

Rather than dominion, let us recover the concept of stewardship – to care for, manage, oversee and protect all that God owns. “Stewardship implies caring management, not selfish exploitation, it involves a concern for both present and future.”

Stewardship and care of the earth is part of the theology of creation. It includes things like using an energy saving bulb and recycling my rubbish. But it is also much bigger than these, as important as these things are. Our theology of creation and care of the earth embraces almost everything in our world. It is things like access to drinkable water, making sure that there is adequate sewerage and rubbish removal; it touches on land ownership and expropriation, housing needs. It also concerns things such as fracking of the Karoo, industrial developments, wage negotiations, and much more besides. So to engage with the Season of Creation is to address things that are controversial, disturbing, very important, and deeply challenging. It is to treat the earth and all that there is, with reverence. We are walking on holy ground.

“We thank you, Father, for the resources of the world and its beauty... Give to all a *reverence* for your creation and make us worthy stewards of your gifts.”

## **WATER (1)**

This week: water.

I grew up on a small holding just outside Stellenbosch. We were entirely dependent on our borehole for all our water needs – for the three families living on the property; and more importantly, for our flock of sheep and other animals. Water is one of those things that we must have for life, to survive. It is not a luxury or a nice-to-have. It is essential.

We all know the immense impact of drought on farms, on food production, on the economy. We all suffer when there is no rain. The severe drought of last year, especially in the Western Cape, was a wake-up call for everyone. We simply cannot take water for granted. It is a basic human need, and having access to safe, pure drinking water is a basic human right.

Those of us living in towns or cities depend very heavily indeed on the state, the authorities, to provide safe drinking water for us all, and to plan and look ahead for the future needs of our communities. That means the state needs to undertake big projects like dams, water pipes, pumps, ongoing maintenance to ensure that the water supply is available. And there is a financial cost to it all. That is why we pay for water. But at the same time, access to water must never be privatised and become something that excludes the poor, or makes access to safe drinking water available only to those with money to pay.

Water is a resource that we are to treasure, to conserve, to care for, to share. We say *no* to factories that pour their rubbish and oil into rivers, or ships that throw their plastic rubbish into the sea, or cities that pump raw sewerage into the ocean, or people who throw plastic bags of rubbish out of their cars as they drive along. Our world is being destroyed by our carelessness and greed. Let's use it. Treasure it. Let's not abuse it.

## **WATER (2)**

Water is one of the most powerful symbols of spiritual life that we find in the scriptures.

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, sparkling like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb... On either side of the river is the tree of life... and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations....” (Rev 22:1-2)

Jesus said to the woman at the well, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” (Jn 4:13-14) – the water of life, living water, the water of salvation.

At baptism, the baptismal water represents many things: water cleans us and revives us; it is through the waters of the Red Sea that the people of Israel were led out of slavery to freedom; it is through the deep waters of death that God brought his Son, and raised him to life; it becomes a sacrament – an outward visible sign of an inward spiritual grace given - by which those baptised are “made one with Christ in his death and in his resurrection, to be cleansed and delivered from all sin” (AAPB pg 382-3).

Our physical thirst for water represents our spiritual thirst for God, our deep longing for connectedness with God and with all of creation, to embrace the earth as sacred, to be treasured and protected: to enjoy beauty, to look at trees and mountains and plants, and to be renewed. These physical things become signs of the presence of God: the bread and wine, fruit of the earth, become the source of life in the Eucharist

## CONCLUSION

Thomas Berry: let us “return to a way of living in the world where we care more about life, love and people than we do about money, status, property and material things...”

“As a deer longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God...” (Ps 42:1f.)

An image of pilgrimage, journey through desolate places and bringing life and hope:

“Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose hearts are the highways to Zion; who going through the valley of dryness, make it a place of springs... (Ps 84:5-6)

We hold together our love and care for God’s creation, with our thirst and longing for God, for the living water in times of dryness and struggle. We drink from the living water that Jesus Christ gives us, the life of the Spirit, flowing in us and through us.

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