

Kerygma – the Proclamation

Sermon message by the Rev Derek Lightbourne, All Saints Belmont and St Alban's Pauatahanui,
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Keynote Bible verses: Acts 17.22 – 31, (John 1.1 – 5)

Last week I had opportunity to follow in Jesus' way, as recorded by Luke in his gospel. Early in his ministry, he wrote: 'Jesus would go to lonely places, where he would pray.' It was just like that. When I tell people I went to Marokopa, they invariably ask, 'where's that.' Its best to describe it as being on the north Taranaki coast, a small village, no shops, no TV, no internet, silence other than the crashing of waves on the distant seashore, and opportunity of viewing the ever-changing scenario of sunsets, and to watch the sun set into the sea. [photos]. It's somewhat like the South Island West Coast village of Okarito. For me it was a week of time for reading, reflection rest and re-creating, walking the dark sands of the wild west coast. I was mindful of God's words to Moses of there being holy ground as I walked along on pristine sand, constantly renewed by the incoming tide. And 'appreciation' comes to comes to mind recalling Psalm 8 – 'O Lord our Sovereign how great is your name in all the earth. You have set your glory above the heavens.... When I look at the heaven the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established, what are human being that you are mindful of them'.

This morning I'd like to share with you some of the reflections, and especially being mindful of the first reading from Acts 17 where St Paul was in Athens, and proclaiming the nature of the Creator God: 'This I proclaim to you, the God who made the world and everything in it, who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things.', and attributes: 'In God we live and move and have our being.'

1) As I reflected on the wonder and in awe of creation, I was mindful of just how integral a part creation is *in the scriptures*. Indeed in my reading I came across a saying from Franciscan insight: 'creation is the first Bible, and it existed for 13.7 billion years before the second Bible was written.' That doesn't take away anything from the numbers of insights in scripture. Think for a moment of the Psalms, think of Jesus and his teaching using ecological imagery – the vine and the branches, the sower and the seed, the wheat and the weeds, the birds of the air, and lilies of the field.....What's less realised I would suggest is the extent to which the early church included things ecological in the '*kerygma*' the proclamation of the gospel.

So it's to the Acts of the Apostles we go. Peter takes the initiative in giving account of the life death and resurrection of Jesus. But for his efforts he and John get arrested. Then we are told the other disciples gathered together to pray – and note the wide-ranging inclusiveness, 'Sovereign God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them.....' (Acts 4.24). Then there's the proclamation of Paul to the people of Athens as this morning's reading.. To the letters of Paul and there's recognition of the divine in creation. Think of those insights from the letter to the Colossians [being one of the readings at the Coronation]: 'Christ is the image of the invisible God the first-born of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and earth were created, things visible and invisible.....in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,.....' And to the Romans: 'Creation waits with eager longing

for the revealing of the children of God.. praying that creation will be set free from its bondage toward decay'. More than one writer has pointed to the actions of humanity contributing towards the huge eco- problems of today – pollution, waste, climate changing, decreasing diversity of created life, and destruction and death from war. No wonder, even in those early times, the people of God looked toward 'a new heaven and earth.'

2) From this, there's an insight which has huge implications as we consider the place of humanity in the universe. Near the end of Mark's gospel, as Jesus commissioned the disciples, there came the imperative: 'Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to all creation'. 'The Greek word used here – *proclaim the gospel to all the cosmos*. Focus on this word has given rise to a whole science – of cosmology – studying the place of creation in its ever-expanding extent and allowing life as we know it to exist. The most popular theory of the beginning is 'the big bang theory'. Note, its 'theory' as no one was there to see it. I believe there's something in the psyche of humanity that there must be a beginning. Yet is it that? Could it be that in the purposes of the divine something was created out of nothing. Current theory is before the big bang there were gases circulating, including helium and hydrogen. Can it be that the scripture is true – 'In the beginning God...' That's why the testimony of John 1 has relevance: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. And all things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being with him was life...'

As I sat at the beach I watched the ever-changing colours of the miracle that is the setting sun and its reflection on the clouds, my thought was of the hymn: 'As now the sun's declining rays at eventide descend....'

3) There's another miracle too, in the human powers of invention and of curiosity. Way out in space in the last year has been the placing of a very powerful telescope, the JWST (James Webb Space Telescope) – at the 'Lagrange point' 1.5 m kms from earth. At a point where all the forces of gravity balance out to keep it in place, orbiting the sun along with the earth. It's well out of the range of the pollution of atmosphere of earth to look back in time and distance to be able to see the earliest stars created in the universe. It will look back some 10 billion years towards what is described as the cosmic dawn. Even further than the Hubble telescope. And its real cold out there – some -233 degrees Celsius. So much for cosmology.

4) What's our response to this?

There surely is awe – of the wonder and extraordinary nature of creation of the universe, and humans place in it as of Psalm 8. And there's other Psalms which place *us in relationship* with the created order. We read in one: 'Praise God, sun and moon, praise him all you shining stars, highest heavens.' St Francis comes to mind as he wrote of Brother Sun and Sister Moon. Humans down the ages have gazed at the stars and wondered- is there life out there? And so there has come SETI - the search for extra-terrestrial intelligence. And it still continues. With the billions of stars and the galaxies there's surely likely to be life, but whether there's intelligent life that's more problematical. Despite efforts there's been no contact made. Indeed some scientists have suggested its better we haven't or aliens might destroy humanity just as humans have successfully destroyed life on the planet. Furthermore there's dangerous radiation out in space and scientists are coming to the realisation as we consider where humans might go - There's no planet B.'

So – to ‘come back to earth’ it’s all the more important we take such issues as climate changing really seriously. It seems evident to me that the intensity of weather patterns are more devastating – storms and droughts and flooding. We are seeing changes in our lifetime. And while cyclones are not new, they seem to be more damaging. Humans are suffering, we read of that, as well as the effect on animals, birds and aquatic creatures.

Concluding then, if we are going to follow in the way of Jesus’ command – to preach the gospel to all creation there needs to be the *sense of urgency* – now and into the future. Our churches mission let me remind you is ‘to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.’ This is our kerygma – the proclamation, let us be active in its promotion by both word and action.