

A Season of Creation, part 1 – 1 September 2024

Message – Wonder and Awe

Creator, Redeemer, and Giver of Life, revealed to us through the wonders and beauty of creation, open our hearts and minds, to your love and grace. **Amen.**

We start our Season of Creation with the theme of Wonder. It seems a little odd to preach on wonder; wonder is experiential, so perhaps we should be having a walk through the gullies of our city, or joining Andy in climbing Taranaki Maunga or Mount Pirongia or Mount Karioi and **then** visit the beach at Raglan and Bridal Veil Falls for good measure. For most of us, all of these places elicit a sense of wonder at the beauty of creation.

The wonders of creation are all around us and we do not have to travel to find them. Standing on a doorstep on a clear night and looking up, we see the stars and the galaxies of the heavens, which may well have followed a beautiful sunset or perhaps the beautiful sight of a rainbow, the sign of God's first covenant with humanity.

The wonders of creation are big and small. Watching in our gardens, we see the beauty of flowers and foliage forming and flourishing and even in perishing. There can be beauty, in the colours of autumn, harbinger of winter but so beautiful along the way. There is beauty in frost and snow, the wonder of the uniqueness of every snowflake, something which we cannot observe with the naked eye but which curiosity has revealed to us.

We are surrounded by amazing fauna as well. Our national

bird, the Kiwi, is one of the most extreme of all the birds. Relative to its body weight it lays amongst the very largest eggs. Because beaks are measured for the nostrils to the tip, it is also the bird with the shortest beak! Even a glimpse of a Kiwi in the gloom is a thing of wonder, whether in the wild or captivity. The life of these islands creates a deep sense of awe if we will just take the time to notice and to treasure it.

And, in case we are tempted to think that awe and wonder are limited to the religious or spiritual realm, in positive psychology there is a growing body of evidence for the value of our sense of wonder and the need to cultivate it. Wonder and awe help us to see our place in creation. They make us feel small, which is a good thing, they put life into perspective, reduce our internal monologues, and help us to look beyond ourselves, to look to others and to work with others creatively and collaboratively. ([HBR 2021/08](#))

Perhaps that is the rather unsubtle point of God's response to Job, the start of which was our first reading. Job and his three friends, his 'comforters', are focused on why God has allowed all this suffering to happen to Job. They are oblivious to the others who have suffered in the midst of all this. They are focused only on Job's suffering. The angry young Elihu comes in and to some degree repeats the arguments that have already taken place but with a general move to recognising the wonders of God's good creation.

Then we have God's response. God's response points relentlessly to the wonders of creation. The debate has been all about why Job is suffering, or philosophically, why bad things happen to good people. God's answer sidesteps the question. The only answer God offers is that we should

recognise our place in the universe. God's creation is good; we are remarkable; yet we are insignificant and life is unfair; and still the source of all love loves each one of us.

Wonder and awe are in some way the first answer to suffering. Wonder brings us to a place of humility. From the place of humility many things become possible. Life becomes about how we can make the world a better place.

For me, wonder also invites curiosity. The church has not always had a good relationship with curiosity, as Galileo, for one, will point out. Sometimes curiosity can be a distraction, we try to solve problems that aren't actually problems, "*if it ain't broke, don't fix it!*" However, many of the great discoveries of the modern age have been driven by persistent and focused curiosity, not infrequently at considerable cost to their discoverer.

The more we understand the universe, the more remarkable it seems. Just six physics constants define a small window within which a universe can sustain life. We cannot, at present, answer how or why they are as they are, all we can do is wonder and know that were they not, we would not be here.

Creation, if we are open to seeing, with our whole being, opens us up to wonder, to seeing ourselves as a part of a greater whole and in so doing invites us to care for all of God's good creation.

We are made in the image of the God whose creation is very good. We are told that God would not destroy that good creation, despite our flaws. Surely, in God's image we must care for that creation as God does.

This week, I encourage you, each day, to take time to notice the beauty and wonder of creation. In this season of creation our starting point has to be wonder that brings us to treasure this precious gift that we have been given.