

A Season of Creation, part 4 – 22 September 2024

Message – Restoration

Creator, Redeemer, and Giver of Life, may the wonder and abundance of creation always remind us of your invincible and unending love for us. **Amen.**

Restoration takes many forms. It is unrealistic to think that the human population on earth will have no impact upon the environment. There are many animals which we know shape the environment and the more we learn the more wonderful and complex we realise the relationships are.

One of my favourite animals are ants. They have the greatest biomass of any land based animal, yes, more than humans. A short way behind humans are termites. Ants shape their habitats, influencing soil structure, seed dispersal, and the composition of vegetation in an area. These actions create favourable conditions for other organisms, including various plants, insects, and small animals, thus contributing to overall biodiversity.

A more recent discovery has been the benefit of whales to the oceans. Even in the vastness of the oceans, we are starting to understand that particular animals have significant effects on the life our oceans can support and the carbon that is captured by them. Whales are essential.

Whales move up and down between the different layers of the ocean. We are still learning about the complexities of the ocean nutrient paths but we know that whales bring essential nutrients to the surface through what scientists tactfully call buoyant faecal plumes. These provide food for

phytoplankton, which are food for krill, which many marine animals feed on, including many whales. And, which capture a third of all the carbon released by human activity.

Through migration, the whales also bring nutrients to nutrient poor areas of the ocean. And, when they die, and eventually sink to the sea floor they bring nutrients to the deep sea. Perhaps contrary to expectation, whales increase the fish stock available for humans.

It is fairly obvious that the best way for any animal to survive for millions of years is that it in some way benefits its environment, whether the smallest ant or the largest whale. Any animal that destroys its environment has a short future. While it might be possible to move on for a while eventually the animal will run out of new environment to destroy.

Within the gospels are a wide range of Kingdom parables. They point us to the nature of the Kingdom of God and the many ways in which it is different from an earthly kingdom.

With today's parable we must ask why Jesus chose the very mundane mustard seed; it is not an obvious image for a kingdom. The seed is tiny but in relative terms so too is the plant, which grows to the whole of 1.2 metres. It is an annual. So, like the grass, it is here today and gone tomorrow.

If we assume Mark's version to be the oldest, it seems that both Matthew and Luke saw the problem, they both emphasise how big it can grow, claiming it can become a tree and that birds can nest in its branches. These details are not in Mark's version and it is hard to imagine why someone would make the Kingdom of God less impressive.

So, I think we have to trust that Mark's is the one closer to what Jesus actually said.

In which case we cannot take the easy root out and claim, as some scholars have, that it is not mustard as we know it but a tree or shrub with a particularly small seed. It would still make it an odd choice as the common Hebrew imagery for a kingdom is the might cedar.

This is how the prophet Ezekiel (17:22-24) portrays Kingdoms, as mighty cedars. Judah will be raised up as a might cedar on the highest hilltop and '*birds of every kind will next in it.*' That the birds are mentioned in Jesus's parable suggests we are to contrast the image of the mustard seed with the might cedar. The Kingdom of God is of a very different nature to earthly kingdoms.

Perhaps the simplest way of seeing the parable is to see the seed as the seed of faith that can grow and flourish in each one of us. In the grand scheme of things, our lives are short lived. The continuance of the Kingdom of God is dependent on the seed of faith being passed on to each new generation, in whom it can flourish just as it has in us.

The image we are being offered of the Kingdom of God is not one of grandeur but rather a humble one, fitting with the humble way of Christ. Pliny the Elder, acknowledged the usefulness of mustard while also saying it was somewhat invasive and once established could not be got rid of.

This is not the image most of us have of the church but it might also be comforting. The Kingdom of God is somewhat like a rampant weed. The seed of faith cannot easily be removed from the world. It will find new ways of

being expressed even when it is being suppressed. One only needs to think of the courage and conviction of Christians in countries where Christianity is forbidden. There is something profoundly compelling about the way of Christ.

I wonder if the mustard seed is also the image for the way in which care for creation needs to be transmitted. At a local level we all know people who try to minimise their impact on creation. They see the world around them and find ways of treading lightly on the earth. They show care and love for creation in diverse ways.

We need those tiny seeds of care for creation to grow. We need to cultivate them in our lives. It is easy to think that our own actions are of no consequence. What can we do when the scale of the problem seems so vast.

Humans are fundamentally communal and cooperative. The image of God is found most deeply in our interrelatedness. While the mystery of the Trinity makes no logical sense it makes absolute sense of the claim that God is love. If God is to be found in us, it most certainly must be in our love for one another. So, small actions do matter because they shape the nature of a community. They show what we value, who we value, and the kind of world in which we wish to live.

The Anglican communion is a worldwide communion. If we are serious about loving every member of our Church then we must love those in other countries too. For them, the impact of climate change is already very real. Some of it may be the natural fluctuations of climate that happen over time but all the evidence is pointing towards something much

more serious. And, even if it were just normal fluctuations, our love for others necessitates that we do something about ensuring that every community is resilient. We have to act to restore creation to all that it should be. We need to become a positive part of the cycle of life while we are living as well as when we die.

The Lambeth conference of 2008 set up the Anglican Alliance to help us work on this. Their work, based on the five marks of mission, is about building up communities and building links so that we are aware of the impact we have on others around the world and we support one another. I encourage you to search their website and learn more.

A Rocha are an ecumenical international Christian organisation focused on caring for God's earth. The main strands to their work are restoring ecosystems, growing the next generation of guardians of creation, and fostering sustainable communities.

The range of possible ways in which we might care for creation can easily overwhelm us. It is quite simply impossible to do it all. This is not a reason to do nothing. The biggest changes will come when society changes and puts in place ways of our treading lightly on the earth. In the meantime, our passion for creation sets the tone for our wider society. It needs to become normal to care for God's good earth.

So where do we start. A Rocha suggest that we change one thing at a time and that we give ourselves time to let that new behaviour become embedded. So, we might do one new thing every two or three months. Over time these

changes build up. If we are all doing this, we will find encouragement, we will see in others, things that we would find easy to change. As beings who are fundamentally in community, together we can change the world for better or for worse, the choice is ours.

May God give us the wisdom to choose the path that leads to wonderful abundant life for all creation.