



A time for celebration and care



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Sermon

for Creation Time 2010

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Based largely on an address given at an ecumenical environment service December 2009; adapted and made available for inclusion in Churches Together in Britain and Ireland's Creation Time resources 2010.

Good News for All Creation

At the end of St Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says to his disciples "Go and share the good news with all creation." All creation. The task of believers is not simply to go and communicate a few ideas to a few promising human beings, it is to transform the face of the earth.

We are to be the bearers of good news for the world that God has made. Not for any one little bit of it, for any one community at the expense of others. Not even it seems for humanity at the expense of everything else in the universe. Good news for all creation and especially good news in this International Year of Biodiversity.

And that is why we're here, to ask today what is going to be good news for creation? It looks in the last few decades particularly and perhaps the last few millennia as if the human race has on the whole not been very good news for the rest of creation. Just as quite a lot of our own civilisation has not been particularly good news for the rest of the human race. And that's catching up with us, catching up with us in terms of its practical effects. Catching up I hope and trust in the sense that we are more and more beginning to realise how we have turned our back on that command of the risen Lord, to be and to carry good news for all of his world. So that's our starting point.

During this Creation Time we're trying to ask God to rally us and unite us and inspire us around that vision of a universal good news, which is justice for the creation and justice for God's human children also. And we are witnessing to the deep conviction that those two things are inseparable. Don't please listen to those who say that there is some kind of choice to be made between looking after human beings and looking after the planet. It's one of the most popular and one of the most foolish errors around these days. And there are quite a few errors around.

We are as human beings, in case you haven't noticed, creatures. In Job 38:18 we can find that wonderful reminder of where we stand in creation. God says to Job with unforgettable fatherly sarcasm "Have you comprehended the expanse of the Earth? Declare if you know all this." So we are part of a great interwoven system of life. We live because we are creatures. We depend on the health of the world around us. And because of that, the health of the world around us and our own long-term health are not two things but one. Let's not lose sight of that.

Sadly, we hear all too often how climate change is affecting the most vulnerable communities on the earth. Of our failure to attend to the health and wellbeing of creation, the failure to share good news with creation itself.

St Paul's words in the Letter to the Romans "Hold that vision with enormous clarity and power." When human beings are healed of their sin and their fear, when the trap is sprung and new life begins to roll in upon them then that is a moment of hope for all creation. When human beings find their healing, their deliverance from selfishness and greed and anxiety it begins to make a mysterious difference to everything. You begin to see that God's purpose for the whole creation is glory for all that is made in which human beings share with all other things. Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Over the centuries, people commentating on the Bible have had all kinds of ideas about what that really means. There's a story which I liked very much of Martin Luther in the 16th Century writing his commentary on the Letter to the Romans, getting very, very excited by this passage. And looking up from his work to his dog in the corner of the room and saying "And you will have a little golden tail." Well I hold no brief for Luther's theology but you see his point.

Somehow our deliverance into joy and thanksgiving, into reconciliation with God and one another spills over into the reconciliation and the transfiguration of the whole world we're in. Our liberation is the world's liberation. Good news for us should be good news for the whole of God's world.

So for us to be sharing good news with the whole human race and the whole world in which and from which it lives, is for us to be set free first of all. Set free from the myth that somehow human beings really exist somewhere else than in the world as it truly is. That somehow we're in charge. That somehow this is given to us to use as we wish, as if we were not embodied but disembodied. As if all we were, were greedy wills sucking the world into ourselves.



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We need to be delivered from that, we need to be delivered not only from untruth but from fear. The fear that if we take steps of courage and generosity in relation to the world and to one another somehow we will make ourselves a little bit less comfortable. Well we probably shall and I think it is high time the Christian churches were able to say loudly and clearly and unanimously "So what."

If we make ourselves a little bit less comfortable. If we drawback from a little bit of our space and our liberty so that others may have the space and liberty they need for life, so what. Thank God if we find the courage to do it because in our willingness to step back in generosity, in spirit filled generosity there is life and good news for others.

Constantly we're being challenged in the Bible not to be afraid. And I do hope that during this Creation Time we'll be able to say that to ourselves and one another. Because this is not about fear, this is not about all of us as Christians saying to the rest of the human race "It's time to panic. Worry harder." Because mysteriously that doesn't actually change very much. What we have to say is in the sharing of good news there is life for us, life for our neighbours, life for the creation in which God has placed us. And that is something for joy not fear.

So please, let's focus on the thanksgiving and the wonder of the gift we've been given in our universe. And the gift of faith, perspective, courage, spirit filled vision that is ours.

Back to Job again. "Who determined the measurements of the Earth, who stretched the line upon it? On what were its basis sunk? Who laid its cornerstone? When the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy." Now that is where our passion for creation comes from. It's the singing of the heavenly beings; it's the morning stars rejoicing. It's creation as a gift for which we must be grateful. A gift in whose life and for whose life we must act not out of fear but out of love, out of generosity. And out of the hope of that freedom of the glory of the children of God.

"Go..." says Jesus "...share the good news with every creature, with everything that has been made. We have been privileged to hear good news and so we renew our commitment to speak that good news courageously in a world so appallingly hungry for it. To speak good news to the poorest and the most vulnerable, to speak good news to the creation abused and exploited by us.

If the God of Job and the Lord Jesus Christ and St Paul are right then our witness in this respect truly is a sign of our liberation. And a sign of hope in the world.

May it be so.

Amen.