

The first in our 'Creation' series of Sunday Sermons running through August

'From Christ, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.' (*Ephesians 4.18*)

When we bought our house on Bath, it included a dilapidated back yard. Several years later we have succeeded in clearing it up and, as the lifestyle magazines recommend, we have turned it into a leafy 'outside space.' I was sitting there in the recent heatwave when I saw a green and black caterpillar on my 'Starlight Symphony' rose. When I looked closely, there were dozens! I startled them and they all dived over the edge of the leaf, hanging down with just their mouths attached to the leaf hoping, presumably, that I wouldn't see them. In other years I would have knocked them off or gone for a soap and water spray. But I had heard that blue tits need lots of caterpillars to raise their young - so I left them. Looking further I found dark grey caterpillars on my Datura and a third species on the tobacco plants.

I made the decision to leave them all alone, along with the mosquito larvae swimming in the standing water of our unused fire bowl. So in the recent heatwave I would sit outside admiring my increasingly lace-leaved plants and watching the swifts screaming overhead. Two evenings in a row a bat circled jerkily round. I hope he was after the mosquitos.

We often talk about the Christian family as the body of Christ. It's harder to recognise that not just the human family, but the whole of creation is connected by invisible threads. As we learn more about creation and the web of interdependency connecting animals, insects, birds, geology, climate, vegetation and human activity, we must have concerns about the effect we, the human population, are having. If with a careless spray of insecticide we destroy insects, then bats and swifts are left to starve. The Genesis creation myth suggests that even two and a half thousand years ago, our spiritual ancestors understood that we are created to steward the earth, not to exploit it. We should worry that our current use of the earth for intensive food production, logging, mining, and oil extraction is exploitation rather than stewarding. Though I don't have an answer to how to use the world more gently.

It does seem to be the case that if we husband the earth it will bring forth food. Our spiritual ancestors understood that even when we are metaphorically lost in the wilderness, God nurtures us. As Christ argued, God the Father who gave manna to the Israelites in the wilderness is the same Father from whom Christ came - Christ who is himself the bread of life.

The web of interconnectedness extends beyond humans, beyond living things, even beyond the world. Those of us who receive Christ in word and sacrament today are 'from Christ, the whole body' as Paul says, 'joined and held together by every supporting ligament, growing and building itself up in love, as each part does its work.' But if one part of the web is broken - by exploitation or abuse or overuse, then the web of environmental, social, political and community interactions is damaged and all creation suffers.

Although we cannot know to what extent human activity is responsible for climate change, it seems to me that it is up to us to make more room for the rest of the inhabitants of the planet and allow the web of interactions to re-form. We can't solve things overnight, but we can make an effort to work together as a church and to link up with other churches and agencies in recognition that we are all part of the created world and responsible for it.

So, what can we do? Let's start by becoming aware of our connectedness with God's creation and celebrate it. Then we should think how we can commit to protecting and preserving it. As a church, let's use these five Sundays in August to look at creation, its beauty and complexity; our responsibility to it; and possible ways of responding to it. As part of this process let's celebrate creation - maybe by photographing or drawing or painting a flower, or sculpting or embroidering or whittling in wood. In some way, let's celebrate God's creation. And we can bring our personal 'creations' to Christ Church where we will collect them up and exhibit them on Sunday September 5th.

Secondly, during this month of August we are invited to think of one change we could make in our life in response to the needs of creation. There are some ideas in the bulletin. It doesn't have to be huge - perhaps just, 'I promise to turn off the tap when I brush my teeth.' It's up to each of us to choose. Once you have decided there will be a chance to write it down - anonymously if you wish - and share it.

The world God had created is very good. We have an opportunity, now, to pause and recognise just how good it is, and how vulnerable - and to make a decision to respond to its vulnerability. I said at the beginning we are all interconnected. If we each make one small change, and encourage each other to make one small change, together we can make a global change - as, in Christ, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love.