

A Season of Creation, part 2 – 8 September 2024

Message – Abundance

Creator, Redeemer, and Giver of Life, revealed to us through the abundant life of earth, open our hearts and minds, to your love and grace. **Amen.**

As someone who specialises in anxiety today's gospel is squarely aimed at me. While some of us turn worry into an art form, all of us worry at times. It is a part of the human condition so the gospel passage applies to us all.

Chapter six of Matthew's gospel starts with a critique of religious hypocrisy: our prayer should be simple; we should forgive as God forgives; and our spiritual disciplines should be private. It is our personal journey with God that matters, not how we appear to others. No doubt, Christ would have a few choice words for our image driven world and the virtue signalling that too often covers up lives and actions that are neither authentic nor loving.

All of us need to examine the degree to which our lives have the integrity which Christ was encouraging. It is not about image; it is about who we really are.

Having challenged religious hypocrisy, Christ moved on to consider real Kingdom values and challenges our greed, materialism, and worry, stemming from misplaced, worldly, priorities. Christ calls us to trust in the abundance of creation, God's kingdom, and God's love.

The first question is where our wealth is stored. Treasure in heaven was a well-established metaphor for those things

that are good and of eternal significance. Living a loving life has real and lasting consequences in the here and now. Our loving actions reduce pain and distress in people's lives. Our loving actions bring peace and comfort. Our loving actions bring joy and happiness.

These are fruits in the here and now but they are more than that. Our loving actions shape the lives of others too. Our loving actions encourage love in others. We will not see all of the fruit of our actions but generations to come will. We must choose whether our actions will be loving and life-giving or selfish and life-destroying. Our choices have a ripple effect through time and space. A lasting effect, we are building up a legacy for generations to come.

This passage is not a prohibition against wealth. It is an invitation to ask whether our wealth is serving us or we are serving our wealth. We cannot have our vision fixed on two different things. We cannot serve both God and money. God provides abundantly for our enjoyment. Our wealth is an opportunity to be '*rich in good works, generous, and ready to share*', as the writer of the first letter to Timothy points out! (*1 Timothy 6.17b-18*)

So, what will we place in our hearts and as the focus of our attention, love of God or honour or money or pleasure.

If you place a thing in the centre of your life
That lacks the power to nourish
It will eventually poison everything that you are
And destroy you (*Faithless – Liontamer*)

Words from a pop song. It is not that the world is not crying out for spiritual truth, it is that the truth has not

found in us. It is only love of God that has the power to nourish us. It is love of God that will bear fruit abundantly.

This is the point at which our gospel reading comes in. *‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?’ (Matt 6.25)*

This is an invitation to have faith in, and commitment to, God, and to the way revealed in the life of Christ. It is not a prohibition against planning nor an invitation to carelessness, indifference, laziness or self-indulgence. It is an invitation to hold the love of God before us in the knowledge that God first loves us and to focus on making that love a reality in our lives and in the lives of others.

If you have ever watched the birds of the air when they are in your garden, you will probably have noticed that they work quite hard for their food, whether it be hunting for seeds, nectar, insects, or worms. Yet, mostly, they do not worry about finding their food or a place to sleep or a mate. They mostly just get on with living. We do see that they experience loss when a partner dies, it is not that life has no other considerations or dimensions.

Worry adds nothing to our life. Mostly, it detracts from life, not only can we not add to our length of life but worry may in fact shorten our length of days. The way of Christ is seeking the balance expressed in the serenity prayer:

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,

and Wisdom to know the difference.

This poetic passage from Matthew's gospel points us to reconsider our priorities. As we reflect on the birds of the air, the lilies of the field, and the myriad life forms on the earth, we see that they are all interconnected. God's care for creation needs to be reflected in our care for creation. Our greed is literally costing the earth. We are disrupting finely balanced ecosystems and causing rates of change to which neither we nor they can adapt. Where is our love for creation, reflecting God's love for the abundant creation?

This passage also speaks to the need for social justice. For the poor, it is hard not to worry about where their food and clothes and shelter will come from. This passage puts the love of others to the fore, it is the good news Christ came to proclaim, liberty for the oppressed. We are the body of Christ, God incarnate, it is for us to love the poor, the starving, and the vulnerable.

While it is hard to notice the improvements, we have, unsteadily, moved to a point where fewer people are starving. In fact, there are now more overweight people in the world than there are mal-nourished.

The UN calculates that the world currently produces more than enough food to feed everyone. As Gandhi put it, *'there is enough for everybody's need but not for anybody's greed.'* It is not clear how we will meet the needs of the next two billion people before the human population peaks but there are already many options. The big challenge is how to do it without destroying God's abundant creation. It requires a global change of focus. What are the treasures we are

storing up, are they focus on the future or on us.

There is a wonderful demotivational poster entitled '*Priorities*' with an image of Easter Island statues. It says:

Hundreds of years from now, it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove... But the world may be different because I did something so bafflingly crazy that my ruins become a tourist attraction.

We must ask ourselves, do we run the risk of turning our planet into an intergalactic tourist attraction much like Easter Island. Hopefully, we have more wisdom than that but history does have a habit of repeating itself, it has to, it is said, because no one is listening!

While the gospel passage encourages us to think on ecology and social justice, it also invites us to celebrate. When we consider the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, we can see the wonder and beauty in creation. It lifts our hearts and it does not end there. We are invited into an ongoing relationship with God, who created all these things, who created each one of us, and who continues to love us.

God will not meet all our needs. To interpret the Bible in such a way is to ignore the challenge of the way of the cross: '*yet not my will, but yours be done*' (Luke 22.40-50) or the story of Job. In focusing on God however we realise that our needs are not as great as we once thought, our blessings are more than we once thought, and we find hope and love in unexpected places and in that we find a peace and joy that is beyond understanding.

God grant us the serenity, courage, and wisdom we need.