

Readings for the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Third Sunday in the Season of Creation

14th September 2025

First Reading: Jeremiah 4:11-12,22-28

At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem: A hot wind comes from me out of the bare heights in the desert toward the daughter of my people, not to winnow or cleanse, a wind too strong for that. Now it is I who speak in judgment against them.

For my people are foolish; they do not know me; they are stupid children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil but do not know how to do good.” I looked on the earth, and it was complete chaos, and to the heavens, and they had no light. I looked on the mountains, and they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro. I looked, and there was no one at all, and all the birds of the air had fled. I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger.

For thus says the LORD: The whole land shall be a desolation, yet I will not make a full end. Because of this the earth shall mourn and the heavens above grow black, for I have spoken; I have purposed; I have not relented, nor will I turn back.

Second Reading: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he considered me faithful and appointed me to his service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance: that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost. But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience as an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Gospel: St Luke 15:1-10

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

So he told them this parable: Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.’ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

“Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, ‘Rejoice

with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

A Reflection for the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

from Rev'd David Higgon

Do we as the church have anything unique to say about the challenges facing our planet, that is not already being said by non-religious environmental campaigners?

People look to scientists and technicians for understanding and for solutions and not the church, and when it comes to environmental issues, the church is good at dressing up a few verses of scripture such as ‘consider the lilies of the field...’ but we do seem to lack a distinct Christian voice. However, when the planet God has given us is under threat, understanding creation in the light of God seems to me to be an urgent task.

It has been argued that the root of our abuse of the planet lies in Judaeo-Christian religion with its emphasis on man’s dominance over the rest of the creation, but to be truthful, we have lived in harmony with nature, that is until the rise of science and advances in technology. It is these and not religion that has caused the environmental mess, and it is a mistake to look at science alone to get us out of it.

There is a perception that to be Christian is to reject modern science, and some Christians do believe that the world was physically and literally created in 6 days, some 6000 years ago. If you ever entertain that idea, take a stroll along Gruinard Bay where you will find rocks that are 3 billion years old, and it is science that tells us the age of the rocks. But it is also important to recognise that the natural sciences only deal with a small part of reality – the things we can see and measure.

Today the dominant opinion in scientific cosmology is that the universe began in a single event, that it had a beginning, which we know as the big bang theory. This corresponds to an ancient Christian understanding that the universe was created by God out of nothing, not out of existing matter. This belief doesn’t depend on science because it is a truth of faith. Through faith, we know of God in creation, not that creation is God but that everything that exists is totally dependent on God for its origin and for its continuing existence. God’s creation is beautiful and intelligent and ordered because God is not a God of chaos, irrational and disordered, so that we may know God in creation.

The idea that the visible creation tells of the invisible God is central to our faith, that God created all things, the visible and the invisible. Natural science can only deal with the material things which it does it at amazing depth, at the subatomic and cosmological level, but it cannot deal with things spiritual. Fortunately, the human mind can, so we can speak of non-material creation, and if you are looking for a Christian doctrine of creation, then you need to look no further than our Scottish Episcopal Eucharistic Prayer 1.

Our worship and our liturgy, like poetry, points us to look behind material things so to acknowledge that there is an invisible side to visible nature, and that there can be no understanding of creation without a recovery of the spiritual and angelic realm.

This we affirm in our worship when we say:

*we offer you our praise,
with angels and archangels
and the whole company of heaven,
singing the hymn of your unending glory:
Holy, Holy, Holy Lord,
God of power and might.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.*

The preface to the Prayer leads us to what we believe is the essence of creation.

'In Christ your Son our life and yours are brought together in a wonderful exchange. He made his home among us that we might for ever dwell in you... He is the Word existing beyond time, both source and final purpose, bringing to wholeness all that is made'.

This speaks of the Son's role in creation that is effected by his becoming part of the creation through the incarnation, where he takes on both a material body and a spiritual but created soul, and through the mystery of his death and resurrection. Christ's power over creation is shown by his miracles for example, in calming the storm and casting out demons, which imply that he shares the identity of God as Creator.

That what is visible and can be subject to a materialist scientific analysis is only a part, perhaps a small part, of reality. There is a cultural and a spiritual, depth to the natural world, which is more often expressed in poetry. A vision of seeing the invisible behind the visible can be found in George Herbert's poem *The Elixir*:

*Teach me, my God and King, In all things thee to see...
A man that looks on glasse, On it may stay his eye;
Or if he pleaseth, through it passe, And then the heav'n espie.*

You can look on the surface of creation or beneath anything and see the presence of God. This presence might even leap out and surprise you, as Hopkins wrote:

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;*

A distinctive feature of our worship is the emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments. This 'new creation' through the Spirit, which undoes the work of sin, is related to the sacraments, the 'new birth' in baptism and the transformation of creation by the power of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist

Through your Holy Spirit you call us to new birth in a creation restored by love... Help us, who are baptised into the fellowship of Christ's Body to live and work to your praise and glory; may we grow together in unity and love until at last, in your new creation, we enter into our heritage in the company of the Virgin Mary...

If creation needs to be restored, something has gone wrong. We are part of creation, but as we have freedom of choice, our impact on creation is not the same as the impact of, for example, an asteroid. We can choose not to have this impact while an asteroid does not have free choice. Our actions have moral value and so our choice to encourage environmental degradation, is rightly described as 'sin' or 'evil'.

Honesty about sin and keeping hold of hope are essential in what distinguishes a Christian understanding of creation. By birth we are a part of creation, by the new birth of baptism we are a part of the 'new creation restored by love'. The mystery of the Incarnation, of the sacraments and our incorporation in the body of Christ means that individualism is not an option for Christians and we need a strong sense of interconnectedness with the whole of God's creation. The environmental crisis is our crisis, and we are called to confess our guilt and cooperate with God in sustaining creation, and in remaining ever hopeful by trusting God.

The Russian Orthodox Bishop Tryphon suffered terrible tortures in a Soviet labour camp but before he died there in 1934, he wrote a hymn called 'Glory to God for All Things', in which he expresses a vision of a creation which finds its meaning in praise:

How poor is my praise before you! I have not heard the song of the Cherubim, a joy reserved to the souls on high, but I know the praises nature sings to you.

In winter, I see how in the moonlit silence the whole earth offers you prayer, wrapped in its white mantle of snow, sparkling like diamonds.

I see the rising sun rejoice in you, and I hear the chorus of birds raise a hymn of glory.

I hear the forest mysteriously rustling in your honour, the winds sing of you, the waters murmur and the processions of stars proclaim you as they move in harmony for ever in the depths of infinite space.

What is my poor worship? All nature obeys you, I do not; yet while I live, I see your love. I long to thank you, pray to you and call upon your Name.