

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

13th October 2019

Proverbs 8:22-31

Spirit... beyond what we can imagine... may we trust... beyond what we can know... may we have faith... beyond what we can speak of... may we dream... and step into a place... we have never been before... so be it... Amen

I wonder if we need to rethink God...

I wonder if... in order to respond to the ever quickening crisis that is our impact on our environment... we need to rethink how we think and imagine God...

That's not meant to be a throw away line... It is fundamental to us all... that how we imagine God... and how we have developed a relationship with the eternal... through our religion and culture and traditions... is actually... in a fundamental way... part of the cause of climate change... as we've deemed ourselves masters of the earth... using our religion to do it... owned it... without the sophistication of an ethic that helps us live wisely and with integrity in creation...

Because there are one or two things about our ecological crisis we need to redeem... One is that let us not be so arrogant as to imagine we need to save the planet... The planet is perfectly fine thank you very much... That's not climate change denial... it's just reality... Planet Earth has been a whole lot warmer than it is now... so warm ice was nowhere to be seen anywhere on the planet for generations... And Planet Earth has been a whole lot colder too... Snowball Earth as it was known... was rather milky and cold where half the oceans disappeared locked up in great glaciers and continental icecaps...

And Planet Earth has also had a whole lot more CO₂ in the atmosphere... indeed when it first started out... the atmosphere was thick with the gas... yet within that particularly dangerous atmosphere for us... life began... blue green algae... that breathed in the CO₂ and breathed out Oxygen over a billion years... changed the whole climate... did the opposite of what we are doing... and in that changed climate... new forms of life grew... Climate change is nothing new on Planet Earth... It is one of the constants...

So climate change is not a worry for the planet or for life... It is a worry for us... because we have existed on this planet during an extraordinarily stable period in climate history... in fact you could argue... there has rarely been a more stable period which enabled humanity to evolve... but we do our continuing existence few favours... in choosing to add acceleration to a natural cycle of the planet's changing climate...

So let us not imagine we are masters of this... We are rather servants of it all... Saving the planet is not our place... and religion does us no favours in implying... we are the pinnacle of creation... and dominant over it... Clearly we are not...

Which is perhaps why we need to rethink God...

And given that we are now into the sixth great extinction... where up to 95% of all life could become extinct... if you believe the previous five extinctions... where anything between 75% and 97% of life died... then perhaps we can understand... there are natural events and cycles and feed back loops that are taking place... that we have little influence on... the idea we are in the job of saving the planet is plainly ridiculous...

Life... however... is very tenacious... It is very robust... It is very imaginative... and despite the worst it does to itself... and despite almost all of life being wiped out in the past... here we are... perhaps because of those events that enabled new forms of life to evolve in new climates... humanity being one of them... to develop cities and technology and green revolutions as well as desertification, conflict and hunger... all of which has been supported and given credence by capitalism... social darwinism... and religion...

Which is perhaps why we need to rethink God...

You see... when we tell our first faith stories... we begin with creation... It is where we turn... with some speed and enthusiasm when ecology becomes the topic... The Bible's first words are creation... Indeed the first words we have... are not God... but about the imagination of creation...

The first words... about light... or silence before the first order was born... the spirit moving... a midwife over that chaos... We speak of the creation of moon and sun and stars... of land and sea monsters... leviathans and every creature that could fly... and we

continue... building g to a great creative climax... all those first moments... creatures... fields... sky... until finally... finally... God's pinnacle... the greatest first... humanity... filled with the breath of God from the dust of the earth...

It is a marvellous story... all those firsts... all those initial moments... as more and more stuff was created... over seven days... and while we do not read it necessarily as literal history... we believe the poetry... putting us at the top of the creative tree... and so of course we speak in terms of saving the planet as if it is ours... We've been given stewardship... we have dominion... responsibility... God has given us that...

Which is why perhaps we need to rethink God...

Because right in the middle of a lesser read book... Proverbs... we read something different... It is not light that was first created... It wasn't sky or sun or land... and it certainly wasn't humanity...

God's first creative act... was not stuff... was not material elements... was not DNA... was not even life... God's first creative act... was Wisdom...

God's first creative act was to create the principles and morality and ethics and the values that help found life... and gave moral cause... give value... Lady Wisdom... and between the two of them... Wisdom and Love... this wise and wily woman... and God the Creator... the physical universe was imagined and brought forth into life...

And do you see what that means... in a truly religious understanding... everything that came forth from that moment on... was bound together by moral value... by an ethic of love... A religious understanding recognises wisdom is woven into the warp and woof of all that is... Reason binds the universe together...

The whole idea of a web of life is true... It is core to a religious understanding of life... but the web... the great cosmic unity... is wisdom... morality... love... the founding... binding principles of everything in creation...

And to live wisely... with respect and honesty and grace... all of which are the signs of wisdom... holds that cosmic unity together... guards the web of life... When we live unwisely... dishonestly... selfishly... the order frays...

Which brings us back to that idea that we need to rethink God... because if you want to find God... you'll find God in the diversity of creation... We've turned God into a national deity... a western religion... an exclusive club... a gate keeper for personal salvation...

But proverbs says... if you want to find God... the unity of God... the expression of God... is found in the diversity of creation... which is the partnership of wisdom and love... and that partnership... the morality of wisdom and the love of God... holds the whole created order together... without wisdom... and without love... the fabric frays... which is a call to a more ethical way to live... and choose wisely... sacrificially... within creation...

That is why a *religious* vision of the environment is so important... It offers the greatest value to creation because everything around us is an expression of God...

And given our environment is the entire... and the only context of our lives... Everything we do... is within this expression of God...

And so when we hurt that expression of God... we lose some of the value in ourselves... we lose wisdom... we hurt love... we diminish our integrity... we reduce ourselves... our worth... and the fabric frays...

Rethinking God... moving God away from a religious gatekeeper of salvation... to the expression that is creation... moves us from imagining ourselves as planet savers with power over the world... to living more wisely... finding our worth... our value... bound up in the fabric of wisdom and love... that have shaped the beauty and completeness of creation...