

**New Kilpatrick
Sermon
Genesis 1:1-5, and onwards
10th September 2017**

Spirit... may we not linger here... in the echo of your presence... but follow it... in word... in action... in imagination and creativity... from this place... to every place we find ourselves... that what we meet here... and find here... and discover here... is our map into the world again...

The front page of a newspaper... is meant to capture the most important... significant... things that are happening in the world... and there are times... when the news on those front pages... causes you to think again about what you say or do or even sing in church...

We have the theme of creation today... We follow a plan of readings and stories each year... So creation was the theme planned way back years ago... and when I saw that was the theme... I thought... great... hymns will be easy... there are many creation hymns... and of course we'd start with 'All things bright and beautiful'... except our front pages filled with images and stories from people across the Caribbean may not agree with that today...

We can only imagine... and only then with difficulty... what it must be like when that turquoise beauty turns to destruction on Barbuda and British Virgin Islands etc... destroyed overnight by the very force of nature that created those islands in the first place...

On the one hand we use creation as evidence of God... The world is so beautiful... it must have been created by someone... and on the other... use it to deny God's existence... How can a loving God design a world... that creates such destruction... Leaving aside that all of this is perhaps evidence more for the existence of climate change than God... such an understanding of creation is one that isn't particularly biblical... because the Bible really says something else...

Actually... the first words of the bible... the first creation story... rather offers one of the most radical and transformative ideas in our history... both morally and politically... We fight over the historical accuracy of a seven day creation against the idea of the big bang... when actually... the way the Bible speaks of creation... offers the world something far more significant and important...

The creation story is not written to be a series of facts... rather it is an invitation to rethink how we must understand and live in the universe...

If you were to go to any other culture's creation stories... you'd hear stories filled with battles between the gods... and a struggle for domination... the fight between Gaia and Uranus in Greek mythology... Zeus and Cronos... Jupiter and Saturn... etc...

Genesis... written when the Hebrews were in exile in Babylon... in the midst of all these conflicting mythologies... utterly dismisses this idea of creation resulting from battles and power and violence...

It changed how people thought about the universe... In the past it was focussed all on might and power and energy and force... But in the Bible... that isn't there... instead... God says... "let there be"... and there is... There is nothing about winning battles... or the strongest or most cunning having the upper hand... Instead... the one word that appears time and time again... and quite unexpectedly to those who are not familiar with the story... the word... 'good'... God saw it was good...

Now that might fall of deaf ears if you are in Florida this morning waiting of Irma to arrive... but that is not what it means... what it means is... Creation isn't some plunder to win... some bag of goodies for the victor... Creation instead has a moral content... Creation has at its very fundamental core... something ethical... because the word good... is not another word for 'nice'... the word good... is a moral word...

The universe... creation... is not about power and domination... and which multinational wins the rights for her land... but about goodness and morality... This very first story shifts everything from "how did the universe come to be"... to "how might we live" because this is a story... for the first time in human history... that talked of a God who was interested in justice... in morality... in love... in kindness... in the value of life... God saw that it was good... morally good... and that is morally written into the DNA of creation...

And for those who imagine we can use creation just as we want... and for our own means... and without recognition of the moral balance of life... really ought to read their bibles again... They only need to read the first page... to hear these words... that creation

is essentially a moral question... and plundering it for our economies... and power... and destroying it through conflict and pollution... is stripping out the moral foundation of the universe...

And just to emphasize that a little more... this same story... (remember this is only the first page in the Bible)... has these remarkable words... "So God created humankind in God's own image... in the image of God... were they created... male and female God created them"...

Made in the likeness of God... Just think about that... in the era Genesis' words were written... In the first civilisations... in Mesopotamia and Egypt... even Greek and Roman times... that was common place... certain people were said to be in the image of God... The king... the Pharaoh... Caesars... each one an image of god... but to say we are all made in that image... could anything be more significant and radical?...

This is a startling protest against hierarchy... class systems... caste systems... in ancient and modern times... and it is fundamental to how we understand creation... because it is on the front page of the bible...

In the most foundational and original sense... we are all equal in dignity and worth... culture or creed... colour or faith... And so different a way of thinking this was... even the Bible took time to catch up with itself... for there are stories ten a penny of hierarchy and elites... and God always protests against them... and ultimately none of them worked... There is a profound egalitarianism rooted in the very fundamentals of the bible... and it is there right on the front page...

Our story of creation is one that invites us to respond to the devastation of the Caribbean... not with arguments about how God could create a world that does this... but with the question... how then shall we live... towards each other...

For our creation story takes us right to the centre of Irma... We are made in God's image... we are essentially part of a creation that has at its root a shared responsibility towards each other... that speaks of equal dignity and worth... where hierarchy and gaps between rich and poor... and castes and class and clan... are anathema to the whole moral goodness of creation... It's not kings and emperors that are only made in God's

image... it is us all... and the creator cares about the whole moral order... about justice and dignity and compassion for all of creation... for every part of it... the value of it all... and that is sown into the DNA of the universe...

Genesis... was a radically new way of thinking about the environment... a moral way to think about it... and each other... with dignity and worth... when it was first written those thousands of years ago... Sadly... it still feels new...

Remember we began with the front page... that make us stop and think... as it captures the most important... significant... ideas and stories of the moment... Such is the wonder of the bible... it's own front page... now thousand's of years old... still captures the moment... and causes us to think again about what we believe... how we live towards each other... and where we find ourselves in this moral order...