Season of Creation 16 August 2009
Week 1: Biodiversity — celebrate creation!

Welcome & Notices
Scripture:
Job 28:1-11
1 Tim 4:1-5
Matt 6:25-33

Message

INTRODUCTION

- I love the story of God creating the world.
- And there are two stories
  - One is majestic and universal in its scope
    - God is out there creating the world, the universe!
  - And the other is intimate
    - God is down here shaping man out of the dust of the earth
- And in that second story out of the dust of the earth he shapes the animals:
  - the beasts of the field and the birds of the air
    - And he brings them to man to see what man would name them.
- And there is a deep respect, I think, in that story, of a world that is in balance, in harmony
  - God, man, and the animals
    - All creation made from the dust of the earth under God.
- There is a harmony between man and nature, and indeed this is presented as the ideal
  - It is after this story that the fall happens and humanity finds itself evicted from this ideal and live in conflict with God, with nature and with themselves.
- Part of the redemption that Jesus offers, then, is not just the restoration of relationship between humanity and God
  - But is also the restoration of relationship between humanity and nature
- So as we journey together over the next six weeks
  - We're going to be looking at this relationship, and how we can work together with God to work towards a world that is in balance.
    - The theological term is being 'co-creators' with Christ
- In other words, God didn't do the work of creation and disappear

    - But God desires to walk with us and work with us in doing a continuing work of creation.
- And as I look at our readings today, particularly the two from the New Testament, the one word that comes to mind is this: celebrate!
    - Celebrate creation in all its diversity
    - Celebrate creation in the good things that we have
    - Celebrate creation in the way we live
- I don't intend to preach long today
    - It's a baptism service, and there are lots of visitors, and children who get restless
- So if you don't hear anything else of the service
    - Just hear the word celebrate, because I think that it is one that we often forget as Christians!

(1) Celebrate Creation's Diversity

- Wont you look around you just for a moment
    - What do you see?
        - People!
- And amazing people!
    - People of every shape — some wish their shapes could be different! (Me — add weight)
    - People of all different colours!
        - Little people and big people!
    - And how wonderful was it to be able to celebrate a baptism today with the little ones?
        - To be able to celebrate that God has created them too!
- And that's just in this building
    - As soon as we go outside we're going to see birds, and hear dogs, and if we look closely enough we'll probably see some ants and other insects
        - Some creatures with six legs, some with eight, some with wings, some feelers, and prickly bits.
    - We call all these different animals the biodiversity of creation
        - Did you know that South Africa has the third highest level of biodiversity in the world!
- Paul is writing to Timothy, a young friend and follower of Jesus, and while he is speaking about how to live, he mentions that God created everything.
    - That is the basis of our faith

- This is how the bible starts — the story of God's creation, and while it may not be factually true, it communicates to us this deep truth
  - God created, and calls us to live in harmony with what God has created.
    - To celebrate the differences in the world
- Imagine how boring it would be if everybody were the same?
  - If we all dressed the same, spoke the same, thought the same?
- But we are all different, and each of us, regardless of how big or how small, has a part to play in the wonderful world which God has created.
  - I heard this interesting fact the other day:
    - If all the bees on earth were to die, humanity would survive for only three or four years.
  - Every little bit plays a part!
- Those of you who grew up in the eighties, do you remember the Atari games console?
  - Long before Playstation or Wii, x-box, or computers
    - It was a bit more advanced than pong!
- But Atari had a game and it was one of my favourites called breakout, and there were six or seven differently coloured layers of blocks at the top of the screen, and you had a bat at the bottom of the screen
  - And a ball would come down, and you had to bounce the ball back, and each time it hit a layer it would take out one block
    - Until you had knocked away all the coloured layers, and of course as you knocked out more the ball got faster and more difficult to hit
- But here's the thing
  - There was a little gap between the top of the layers, and the top of the screen, and once you broke through the wall, the ball would go all the way through and bounce between the top of the screen and the wall, knocking out bricks it went
    - it did the work for you, and once you got through the wall things started going quickly, the brick started disappearing
- Now God has created everything good to work in harmony with each other
  - I'm afraid that when we stop celebrating our biodiversity, and instead start using and abusing what we have been given (as we have done), that it is going to be like that wall in breakout
    - That things will suddenly start falling apart very quickly
- I pray, simply, that those who have been baptised today will grow up knowing that God has created the universe to be celebrated, rather than destroyed

- An that they, together with all of us, will discover the part which they have to play in this wonderful creation
    - ✳ A part to play in celebrating the broadness of the biodiversity that is around us

(2) Celebrate God's good creation!

- So that brings me to my second point for this morning, and is one that we often miss in church
  - And this is that God created good!
    - ✳ The refrain that spoken in the first creation is story is, "And God saw that it was good", "And it was very good"
- So often, I think, in our Christian theology we focus on the bad, the sin, the fall, forgetting that we were created in God's image, and created good.
  - We make rules prescribing what we may do and what we may not do
    - ✳ How we should live, how we should not live in order to try to be good to be acceptable to God.
- Paul speaks about these laws as he writes to Timothy, he says these rules come from hypocritical liars because of this very important principal
  - Everything God created is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received in thanksgiving because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer
- So God created in diversity and we should celebrate the difference
  - But God also created good, and we should learn to celebrate that, rather than to fear it.
- Jesus, in speaking to his disciples in the passage that we read earlier
  - And that passage is a part of the sermon on the mount, crucial teachings for his followers.
- But as he speaks to his followers he again reminds them of the nature of creation
  - A world that his father has created and put in place
- And he speaks about our attitude towards life, and I'm going to speak about not worrying in just a moment
  - But as Jesus speaks what I see is a person so in touch with nature
    - ✳ And of course Jesus, and most of those who listened to him would have been more aware of nature than most of us today
  - People who live in concrete jungles and spend hours in the traffic
    - ✳ Jesus and the people he spoke to, most probably labourers, would have been deeply aware of the world around them.
- And so Jesus speaks about the birds of the air, fed by God, and the lilies of the field clothed in splendour.

    - And he says seek first the kingdom of God
- We haven't go time to go into that whole idea of kingdom of God this morning, but part of what Kingdom is about
    - Not about living according to rules to be made righteous
        - ✳ But is about celebrating the presence of God in life, especially in creation
        - ✳ Paraphrase Campolo's story of prostitute and party
- Celebrating the presence of God in that which is created good, even a broken woman doing her best to survive as a prostitute
    - Celebrating the presence of God in the world around us, and not being afraid to live life
        - ✳ To celebrate what has been created good
- And so I pray that each of these children baptised this morning learns to live life to the full, celebrating God's goodness in everything.

(3) Celebrating creation in the way we live

- And so the last thing I want to look at this morning is celebrating creation in the way we live.
    - We heard a story from Job earlier on in which we read of people digging for wealth far below the surface of the earth
        - ✳ In the blackest darkness, far from the falcon's eye and the prowling lion
        - ✳ transforming the earth which produces food.
- I think these are images which we can relate to in South Africa, where our country's wealth has been formed through centuries of mining.
    - And as Job goes on he suggests that this way of living is not wise, and I don't think that he is speaking specifically of being a miner
- But rather is speaking about a life that is so focussed on searching for wealth, that we miss out on what life is really about
    - We miss out on the parties and celebrations!
- And I think that Jesus says the same things as he speaks to his disciples.
    - He tells them not to worry
        - ✳ Not to be focussed on what you will eat and what you will wear.
    - He says the pagans run after these things.
- We have an expression for this lifestyle today
    - We call it the rat race!
    - And God didn't create us to be rats, God created us humans!
        - ✳ Rat race may be good for rats, but not for us!

- But when we live in the rat race there are so many things to worry about from the moment we get up in the mornings
  - And it is when we worry that we start focussing on the wrong things
    - Having the latest fashions, unhealthy rich foods, cars and houses and more money than my next door neighbour.
- We start chasing the very things that cause us to destroy that which we ought to be preserving.
  - I think that there is a simpler way of life, that simpler way of life is called the kingdom of God
    - it's to be found in celebrating creation around us rather than destroying it in our search for wealth
  - Doing what we can to preserve the biodiversity in which we live
  - Doing what we can to create and recreate
    - Celebrating nature, restoring nature
    - Being co-creators with Christ
- And again, I pray that these young people who have been baptised into this kingdom today
  - These young people, in whom, even now, God is at work
- Will grow up knowing what it means to walk, and to work alongside Christ in his continuing work of creation

CONCLUSION

- Let me close off.
  - Can we celebrate he creation that surrounds us?
    - I know many of you are going to be celebrating today. but as you do that
- Let's celebrate the wonderful diversity that God has blessed us with in his creation
  - Let's celebrate, not the wrong that we see, but inherent goodness in the world around us, and in our own lives
  - And let's celebrate that creation in the way we chose to live our lives
    - And the lives that we model for others.
- And a last challenge!
  - We planned this sermon series for spring, so I hope that each one of us will take the challenge to be a co-creator with Christ, and during the next six weeks will do something creative
  - Plant a tree, make a baby, bring life to a place of death
- May it be so for you, even as it is for me.
- Amen!