

Season of Creation: 20 September 2009
Stewardship: Caring for Creation

Welcome & Notices: NB Andrew Barker

Scripture:

Gen 1:24-31 (Humanity given creation to watch over)

Col 1:9-20 (Christ, the image of God through whom all things were created reconciling all things)

Luke 12:35-48 (The parable of the faithful servant)

Message

INTRODUCTION

- As most of you know, I'm going to be leaving Brackenhurst at the end of the year, and as I haven't yet heard anything to the contrary I'll be going to Standerton
 - Which has absolutely nothing to do with the sermon today.
- What does have to do with this morning's message, however, is what I do with my townhouse.
 - I have received a housing allowance while I've been here, and so have been able to buy a small place for myself, but now I'm going to be moving
 - * Question is do I sell it, or do I put tenants in.
 - My inclination is to put tenant in, but everybody I speak to warns me against that
 - * Because tenants don't usually look after your place very well.
- And this is what today's sermon is about
 - We've been journeying over the last six weeks looking at a season of creation
 - * Really looking at our responsibility towards our world
- And the theme for today is that of stewardship
 - How God calls us to care for what with which we have been entrusted.
- So what does stewardship mean?
 - It means that we do not own anything, rather, we are appointed to care for something for somebody else
 - * We are appointed to care for the world which God has created; to look after it for God
 - * And not only to look after it for God, but also for our children and grandchildren.

- Many times in scripture Jesus uses the image of tenants looking after something for a master, and many times abusing his trust
 - And I guess that God must sometimes feel the way we do when we have tenants in our property and they seem absolutely determined to destroy what we have, rather than to look after it
- And yet, as we saw in Genesis, the beginning of the story of the relationship between God and humanity was one of entrusting the created world to that which God had created.
 - A task which expanded with time for God's people not just to care for the world which he had given them, but also to care for, to be a blessing to others who live in the world
- Part of the essence of Christianity is that we have failed to live up to that task, and it is Christ
 - Through whom everything was created
- Who calls us, and reminds us again, that our Christianity is not just about being reconciled to God
 - But about doing the world of reconciliation between ourselves and others, and the world in which we live
 - * That means how look after our abundant resources so that they are available to future generation
 - * How we treat other people so that justice prevails and all have enough rather than a few having too much
 - * And we also that we call others into deeper relationship, not just with other people, but with the world around us
- Christianity is not just about saving souls, but is also about saving the environment in which we live
 - We do this not because it is the flavour of the month to be green, or to be environmentally conscious, or to recycle
 - * But because it is a biblical imperative
 - Particularly at a time when the world around us does seem to be in such danger from consumption gone mad.
- The essence of Christianity is reconciliation:
 - How do we work out that reconciliation?
- I want to suggest that we start with three statements, that I hope we can agree on and Christians
 - The Lordship of Christ
 - The Leadership of the Church
 - The Labour of Creation

(1) The Lordship of Christ

- While we may agree on the exact definition, the most basic Christian creed is this one:
 - Jesus is Lord
 - * This statement is central to the Christian faith.
- And if Jesus is Lord it means that we are his servants or slaves
 - Sometimes this kind of imagery is not popular
 - * After all, who wants to be a slave?
 - But fundamental to the idea of Jesus as Lord is the equally transformative notion that we are not.
- I think that we have a problem with that!
 - On the one hand, we don't really know what a Lord is, and on the other if anybody around here is going to be Lord, it should be me!
- But when the Bible was translated into English concepts and words were used which seemed best to translate to the ideas and concepts from the original Greek.
 - At time this translation was happening, the best word seemed to be 'Lord' and at that time in England one could clearly see who the Lord was
- The society was feudalistic, and the the term 'Lord' referred to an aristocratic rank.
 - The Lord was someone who had control over the serfs
 - * Someone who controlled what went on on the lands, what was produced, and how the serfs laboured.
 - and etymologists suggest that the origin of the word 'lord' comes from a word that described a chieftain who provided food for his followers.
 - * "Give us today our daily bread"
- So when we call Jesus Lord, it simply means that we stop looking to ourselves and our interests, and start looking to God and his.
 - While I don't think that the type of relationship that God requires from us is a feudalistic one where our only purpose is to produce food for the aristocracy
 - * I think that there is a measure of saying, "If Jesus is Lord", then it is not about me and what I want, which so much of our culture is about today
- Proclaiming Jesus as Lord, as we say we do, is a profoundly subversive anti-culture statement, because everything in our culture teaches us is about how much we can accumulate for ourselves
 - Regardless of the cost to others
 - And regardless of the cost to our environment
- Unfortunately that philosophy has caught up with us, and we've started to realise that if we carry on like this we are going to destroy the earth

- When we call Jesus Lord: The one who created the world, and the one through whom the world holds together
 - When we call Jesus Lord, we listen to his instruction on how to share the resources of the earth, not so that we are kept in poverty
 - * But so that there is enough for everyone.
 - * And resources are used sustainably
- Calling Jesus Lord has to determine how we use the resources which we have been given
 - The Lordship of Christ cries out for the reconciliation of those who have and do not have through sharing of resources
 - And the Lordship of Christ calls out for reconciliation with the planet which we rely on for life

(2) The Leadership of the Church

- As Christ followers; members of the church, our head is Christ.
 - That's what the passage in Colossians is all about
 - * It's a poem describing the different ways in which Jesus is the head
 - He is the firstborn
 - He is supreme
 - He is the head of the body, the church
- In essence, says Paul, Christianity is about Jesus Christ and his supremacy over everything
 - He doesn't use the word Lord, but the concept is implicit in the passage
- If we, as church, truly believe that and live that out then our responses to situations around us
 - Whatever they are
 - * Should be to look to Christ and to emulate Christ.
- Christ is the image of the invisible God; the firstborn of all creation through whom all things were created
 - The church, if Christ is our head, should therefore be passionate about creation ourselves
- And in being passionate about creation it is vital that we should be setting the tone in preserving that which God has made
 - Our hearts should not be to destroy what he has made, but rather to look after it.
- It always saddens me that so often, in so many things, the church seems to be behind the rest of the world
 - It's taken so long for us to start talking about the environment

- Everybody also was talking about hole in the ozone layer, global warming and pollution for years before the church got interested
 - * And indeed, there are many church groups, particularly in the States which proclaim that focus on the environment is a liberal agenda that has nothing to do with Christianity
- So then, If Christ is Creator, if he is our head
 - Then we also are to be creators, and to be stewards of God's creation, and that brings me to my last point for this morning
- Look at Genesis — call of God to his people to be stewards

(3) The Labour of Creation

- I want to look at stewardship, but rather entitled this point the Labour of creation, for a couple of reasons.
 - One of the reasons is that Paul, in Romans describes creation as groaning like a woman in labour, waiting in expectation for liberation from its bondage (Rom 8:18-27)
 - Secondly because caring for creation is work
 - * We don't say, okay, we're going to be stewards of creation, we're going to care for what God has given us, and then not work at it
 - Part of the story of creation which we know as the fall the idea of childbirth and physical labour are linked where the man is given the labour of the soil, and the woman the pain of labour in childbirth.
- And I think that the image of childbirth is a good one in that the work of raising a child is not done immediately the child is born
 - Rather, when the pain of labour is over, the labour of being a parent begins
 - * And I'm not sure that it ever ends!
- But is it good to have parents here this morning who have brought their children to be baptised, part of the work of raising them
 - And I wonder if things wouldn't have been different if a part of our Christian liturgy was, just as we focus on our children and caring for our children, that a part of our Christian liturgy was to focus on the work of caring for creation?
- Genesis clearly tells us that the work of humanity is to rule over creation, and I don't think that the sense here is to destroy it, but rather to tend and care for it.
 - Jesus uses the illustration of a master who goes away and leaves his servant in charge.
 - * Does the servant do a good job?
 - * Is he watching and waiting with lamp at the ready to welcome his master?

- * Is he taking care of his fellow servants?
- * Is he doing his master's will?
- And then Jesus closes off the passage with sobering words:
 - “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked”
- You know, those words, are addressed to us
 - We are the ones who have been given and entrusted with much
 - * Most of us here have much more than 80% of the rest of the world
 - and the reality is that it is our desire to satisfy our continual need for more
 - * From there earliest days
 - * More land, more exotic beasts, more things
- It was this desire that, instead of helping us to be co-creators with Christ, has rather destroyed what he has given to us.
 - We are the ones with much, and if we are to restore what God has given us, the solution lies with us
- It's no good standing back and expecting those who have nothing to solve the problem
 - You and I are the ones who have been given the job of stewardship
 - * You and I are the ones who have much
 - * You and I are the ones who need to change the way we live
- Much will be demanded of those to whom much has been given
 - Caring for creation is a labour

CONCLUSION

- To close off let me offer some suggestions about what we can do.
 - The answer is very simple: live more simply
 - * You probably don't need that new car, the new computer, the new TV
- There are probably things you can do to use less resources
 - Drive a little slower so that you use less petrol: significant saving between driving at 130 and 90km/h (discovered that when student)
 - In the UK there's a movement focussing on next year 10:10
 - * In 2010 cut use of electricity by 10%
- See the government isn't really interested in saving, but if everybody who goes to church makes an effort it makes a big difference
 - Solar water heating; insulate, don't use air cons: affordable to run, not for planet

- Grow your own vegetables, don't choose products that are flown in from all over the world
- Take local holidays, instead of overseas
 - * Live more simply!
 - * Said earlier, it's work!
- Then there are ways to become involved in our environment, in just a moment we're going to be planting a tree
 - We should all plant as many trees as we can in our lifetime!
- Become involved in the environment in which we live
 - Did you know that most of us live in an area which has been proclaimed a conservancy?
 - * The Klipriviersberg Conservancy stretches, in terms of north to south from the N17 at Reading down to the Klip River, and anybody in the area can belong to the conservancy
 - You'll be kept up to date with what is happening
 - and be able to play a part in caring for this area
 - * This church is a member, and many of the members have also joined in the personal capacity
 - This week's small group session is about what we can do, and there's a video about the conservancy
 - * But today if you want to find out more, the chairman of the Conservancy, Andrew Barker is with us, and he'll be more than happy to chat with you.
 - * I don't know if he has membership forms with him, but they are available on our website, are some at the door
- There are many ways of caring for the world around us
 - It is a Christian imperative that we do that because
 - * we proclaim Jesus the Lord of Creation as our Lord
 - * Because we ought to be leading the rest of the world in our response to crises around us
 - * And because God has given us the labour of stewarding creation.
- Earlier I mentioned that I was uncertain as to whether I ought to put tenants in my townhouse or not.
 - Don't know if they're going to mess the place up
 - * But you know what?
 - I'm will put tenants in and choose to trust them.
- This is what God does with us, I hope that we won't disappoint him.
 - May it be so for you, even as it is for me.

- Amen

Prayer of Response and Intercession

- Bind us together as people leave to gather outside

Tree planting (Keith Kirstens's comments)

- Bind us together

Grace

Doxology (May your presence)