

Season of Creation 23 August 2009
Land

Welcome

Prayer of Invocation

Theme of God's presence with us and everywhere — especially in creation

Quote from Genesis — created land

- Hymn 329 — All Creatures of our God and King

Welcome & Notices

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Adoration for the creation of land and its promise

Forgiveness from our misuse of it

As power, status, as economy

Rather than as the giver of life

and revealer of your presence

- 280 — Breathe on me Breath of God

Absolution

Offering

Prayer and Preparation

Scripture:

Gen 12:1-10

Acts 4:32-37

Mark 4:26-34

- Hymn 28 — O Worship the King

Message

INTRODUCTION

- Well, as you know we are journeying through a sermon series as we begin to approach spring
 - Although, with only the brief respite we had the other day it doesn't yet seem very springlike

- * But we're looking at the Season of Creation and how God calls us to care for the world around around us
- Last week we began by looking at the diversity of the world around us and how God created God
 - Today we're going to look at land.
- And land is such an important part of who we are
 - We are bound to the land
 - * The author of the creation story found in Gen 2 suggests that we come from the land
 - * We are created from the dust of the earth and to dust we shall return.
 - And so there is a real sense that we ought to be caring for that which has given us birth, yet too often our relationship with the earth is characterised by neglect and abuse
- The Kingdom of God is linked with the earth / land / soil, and so often when Jesus is speaking about the Kingdom he uses images of the land
 - Things that are growing, as we heard this morning
 - * And you remember the parable of the seeds that are sown on the different types of soil
- Once again I would remind you that our sacred writings come out of an agricultural society
 - A society where people would have been aware of the close link that they share with the soil
 - * A link that was not only vital to the life
 - * They couldn't fly in crops if they had a bad season
 - * They didn't have long term weather forecasts with El Nino
- And so in that society owning land would have been a sign of wealth and prosperity and blessing.
 - * And the correct response would not have been abuse of the land, but to look after it as one looks after one's own life
- So our readings this morning set the tone that proper care and use of the land that God gives us
- And as Jesus contrasts land and the Kingdom of God he continually makes the point that the two are linked to each other
 - When we begin to share the blessing of land, more happens than what we would think
- I know that this is an emotive issue, especially in South Africa at the moment
 - People who want land, and people who feel that land is being taken from them unfairly

- * And particularly land that is taken, and then not used effectively
 - And then also land that is destroyed by misuse — eg water table to build golf courses in Warmbaths; over-farmed using irrigation
- So our theme for this morning, and for this week, is going to be sharing the land builds the land
 - And we're going to be look at the theme under the headings of
 - * Land of Promise
 - * Land of Plenty
 - * Land of Potential

(1) Land of Promise

- The story of the Bible is the story of the promise of land
 - From the second creation story in which the man is shaped from the dust of the earth
 - * Right through to the promise in Revelation of a new heaven and a new earth
- There is the promise of a land where everything will go well
 - And perhaps the reason for that is because our sacred writing have always come out of a place where there was a struggle for land
 - * The Jewish people themselves were, for large periods of time, dominated by other nations
 - And the fledgling Christian community themselves had nothing they could call their own due to the ongoing persecution of Jews, Romans and others.
- So at the heart of our faith story is the quest for land
 - And the promise that our quest is not in vain.
- And perhaps the first time that this quest is mentioned is in our reading from Genesis this morning
 - GOd, Yahweh, speaks to Abram and tells him to leave the place where he is camped and to move to a different place that God promises to his descendants.
- And there is a covenant which is made: I will make you into a blessing — and you will be a blessing.
 - Now this verse is the source of so much conflict in the Middle East
 - * Battles that have been going on since the time of Moses as the Jewish people sought to take the land which they believed God had given to them
- And isn't our desire for land the source of nearly all our wars?
 - We feel that we want more, and so we take what we want by force.

- We want more!
- Yet ironically, I believe that this verse also contains the solution to wars
 - God says, I will bless you with land, but you need to be a blessing to others
 - * All peoples will be blessed through you.
- When we use the land to bless others we, instead of grabbing onto as much as possible, we can begin to resolve our conflicts
 - I think a lot of Israel's problems could probably be solved if they were willing to give up some of the land others are fighting over
 - * But no expert on Middle East politics, so maybe I'm wrong!
- So the first thing that I want to say this morning is that there is for us a place on the land, ie there is a place for us that is good
 - There is a promised land
 - * A kind of a life in which we are blessed, and in which we bless others
 - And this is the place that we journey towards
 - * Not there immediately — it is a journey
- And I want to suggest that while the story of Abraham is literal it can also be read metaphorically
 - In other words, God also calls us on a journey to discover the promised land, and to use what we discover to be a blessing to others.
 - * And I think that this sometimes becomes a condition in the covenant that God makes with us
- The purpose of our blessing is to bless others, and when we don't do that somehow we lose sight of what the Kingdom of God is about.
 - This was the principle that the first Christians rediscovered in the story that we read from Acts, and my second point for today

(2) Land of Plenty

- The land which God calls us to is the land of plenty.
 - There is enough for everybody when we are willing to share; when the land is divided equitably.
 - * When God calls us to the land of promise he calls us to share what he has given
- As I said earlier, I think if the Israelites learned to share, maybe there'd be less conflict in the Middle East.
 - But the first Christians who sought to live as Christ had taught them realised this principal right at the start of the community.
 - * All the believers were one in heart and mind
 - * no one claimed any of his possessions as his own

- * they shared everything that they had
 - * and there was no needy person among them
- Now those last words are important ones because they remind us of Deuteronomy 15:4 which speaks of what life is like not in the Kingdom of God, but of what life is like in the Land of Promise
 - The land that God has not yet given, but will give
 - * The verse from Dt says, “there will be no needy person among you. because the Lord is sure to bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.”
- So Luke is saying very clearly through this verse in the Acts passage that they are people who have taken the covenant promise of land seriously and are doing their best to live it out
 - the early Christian movement, he says, is the true covenant community that God had always intended to set up, and the Promised Land is here
 - * And when we enter this land of promise we discover that it is also the land of plenty!
- I want to make an observation here.
 - I don't think that they sold everything: they shared everything, but they didn't sell everything because otherwise where would they have lived, where would they have worshipped
- I think rather that what happened, and part of the context of those times was that the rich got richer and the poor got poorer
 - People who had land to sell would have been the wealthy
 - * There was no middle ground, it wasn't people selling their own homes to give to the community
 - It was people who had accumulated properties selling what was extra to their needs
- Getting rid of things that had accumulated simply to earn them more and more money
 - Basically what they're saying is that they found a better use for for their assets, and that was to finance the Kingdom of God community
 - * And when they did that, there was enough for everyone
- When we learn to share what we have, there is enough to take care of the needs of everybody
 - And indeed, there do not have to be needy among us
- Let me make an illustration.
 - As a church, let's say we decide that part of our mission is to care for women in abusive relationships, let's say

- * And we decide to set up a house of safety
- We buy a property and convert it, let's say R2m
 - * For arguments sake R20 000 a month bond
- Now we have to staff it, at least a cleaning lady and a house mother full time
 - * Probably have to pay counselling staff, insurance, food
- You're could be looking at R50 000 a month maybe for six or eight or maybe ten beds
 - * That is a very expensive ministry and we're gonna have to rely on a whole lot of lotto money and government grants that never happen, and then we have to employ a fundraiser which costs more money!
- And how many months, years maybe would it take to get it off the ground?
 - * Constitutions, zoning, all those things
- Do you know that there is another way to achieve the same end in a much cheaper way?
 - What about sharing what we have by hosting people in our own homes?
 - * How many empty beds are there in our congregation?
 - Never mind 10 for R50 000 a month
 - * Probably a couple of hundred?
- And we can do it today!
 - Come on! We've all got spare rooms; feed one more mouth, we could all be the kind of caring community that a person needs to heal.
- I know it's not as simple as that! There's no way a stranger is sleeping in my spare room!
 - But this is the land of plenty that we are called to journey towards
 - * When we share the land, there is enough for everybody.

(3) Land of Potential

- In the two stories that we read earlier from the gospel, Jesus tells about the land producing fruit, and he is speaking about the Kingdom of God
 - Soil produces by itself: growth of the kingdom of God
 - * And a small seed grows into a giant tree giving shelter to the birds of the air
- The potential for the growth of the Kingdom is inherent in the soil itself
 - This is how God's creation works.
 - * Night and day; seed-time and harvest, the ongoing cycle of the day and year work to bring about growth (Wright)
- But if we look a little deeper it is the seed which is buried that grows into a new life

- And the Greek word used here for grow into new life, is the same word that is often used for resurrection
 - * Not in the sense of life after death, but about how God would restore Israel's fortune (Wright)
 - * how God would restore the land to them.
- The seed, says Jesus, has been planted, and the land, although you can't see it yet, it ripe with potential
 - Because just you wait until those seeds start to sprout
 - * A small seed, nurtured in the earth, grows into a tree large enough to contain all the birds of the air.
- The land that God calls us to is a Land of Potential!
 - And by sharing the land that we have we are inviting new life, we are inviting resurrection life
 - * We are calling others into a type of life that is different and life-giving
- And we are inviting this potential into our own lives and that of community
 - I don't know about you, but so often I feel overwhelmed by needs that surround us in the community
 - * I look at all the needs and I feel helpless.
- I wonder if things would change is we looked at the needs around us and saw potential for new life, rather than hopelessness?
 - The parables suggest that the Kingdom of God is a place for potential, and that when the seeds are sown they grow all by themselves
 - * maybe we just need to be seed sowers
- Maybe when we are able to provide space, people can begin to help themselves, and begin to grow on their own.
 - When we begin to share the land
 - * The they, and we, can discover our full potential.

CONCLUSION

- When we turn to the covenant of land as spoken of in the Bible
 - We discover a covenant in which God desires to care for all his people
 - * All his people whom he created good.
- When we are willing to share, there is enough for everybody
 - We don't have to grab to get mine
- Heard something interesting the other day
 - If all the world's population were brought to Africa, and we started in Cape Town, and gave everybody 1 square meter of land to stand on
 - * How far do you think we would we go up Africa?

- We'd get as far as Paarl!
 - Of course it's more complicated than that ito land needed for food production and so on.
 - * But there really is enough for everyone if we learn to care for the land, and to share what we have.
- I've been speaking generally, about what we can do as a nation, as community
 - But want to close off by looking at what we can do as individuals
- You see, the land of promise is not just for the nation
 - * it is for you and me
- God has promised us a land, a place where we can be safe and secure
 - And I'm speaking metaphorically now
- There is enough for you
 - Enough grace to get through what you think you can't
- And your life is the land of potential
 - Do you know how much you are; we are capable of?
- Yes, in terms of transforming community
 - In transforming our use of land
- But also in terms of you personally
 - Always be growing
- Often, I think, we don't live in the promised land, we don't live in the land of plenty, we don't live in the land of potential
 - Maybe we're too scared, maybe, I don't know
 - Maybe we don't believe that there is a promised land
- Want to invite you this morning to enter into the land that God has promised
 - And pray that this would be a journey to sharing your land with others
 - * Sharing the promise with others
 - * sharing your plenty with others
 - * That together we may grow the potential of this community and our nation
- May it be so for you, even as it is for me.
 - Amen

Prayers of Response and Intercession; healing ministry (09h30)

- Hymn 349 — O Father whose creating hand

Benediction

Doxology