

Trinity 17, Sunday 22 Sept, 2024

Psalms 19:1-6 - NRSV

1. The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
2. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.
3. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;
4. yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
5. which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
6. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat.

Jeremiah 4:23-28 - NRSV

23. I looked on the earth, and it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light.
24. I looked on the mountains, and they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro.
25. I looked, and there was no one at all, all the birds of the air had fled.
26. I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the Lord, before his fierce anger.
27. For thus says the Lord; The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end.
28. Because of this the earth shall mourn, and the sky above grows black; for I have spoken, I have purposed; I have not relented nor will I turn back.

Mark 15:33-38 - NRSV

33. When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.
34. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
35. When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah."
36. And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down."
37. Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.
38. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

The Best is Still to Come

(Ps.19:1-6; Jer.4:23-28; Mk.15:33-38; 22/9/24)

May I speak in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen

It is good to be back from holiday to complete our series on Creation-tide – looking today at Sky, following earth, humanity, and mountains. I've read them all (on website) they really are good – thanks Alison.

I especially enjoyed last weeks 'mountain' theme – as when Alison was preparing it – I was on Ben Nevis – pushing myself too hard – and as a result, this week – I have not been very well. The highs and lows of life!

Today we look at Sky - through our *caring for creation* lens - as Alison highlighted – the tension between Genesis 1 (dominion over creation) and Genesis 2 (caring for creation).

Despite my illness reminding me that I am not as young as I was, and my arrival home that the nights are drawing in (longer in Scotland) - I am nevertheless calling this sermon '*the best is still to come?*'.

This is not just wishful-thinking or being over optimistic. No, it is a truth that we get from our scriptures today and it is a message we get from God's creation. It is a theme worthy of the *grand finale* of our creation tide series.

The best is still to come because....

The heavens tell of God's glory

In Psalm 19: we read *'the heavens (or sky) tell (declare, announce) God's glory. Day to day it pours forth speech and night to night declares knowledge'*.

Take a moment, imagine, you come to Church, the doors are locked, you stand in the Churchyard, you look to the sky, see (& if you listen carefully, hear) God's glory. Better than any sermon.

No words are heard, yet this creation voice *'goes through all the earth, to the end of the world'*. V4 This telling of God's glory is everywhere, already, now, in creation (great news for frustrated evangelicals like me).

But there's more. *'In the heavens (sky) he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy. It is like a man running a course, it rises from the end of heaven, and does a circuit to the end, nothing is hidden from its heat'*.

This vivid language is not new, it takes us to Genesis when God brought order from chaos, created heaven (better translated sky) and earth, a place for the sun.

So, my first point – the point of Psalm 19 – is God's creation - heavens – sky – earth speak constantly of God's glory. All **we** need to do, is to learn to listen.

But my 2nd point is the sky has grown dark

Sometimes God's glory is hidden – the sky and earth which points to God, is obscured. In this series, we've seen this in the examples of a mine polluting the countryside - or thick smog blocking the sun.

It's also hard to see God's glory in the challenges of life or in the news headlines, especially this week. It's hard to see God's glory when the sky grows dark.

In Jeremiah (another reading for today) we read of judgement on the people of God and on creation itself – 4:26 *'the fruitful land was a desert, and all the cities were in ruins, before the Lord's fierce anger'*. Creation itself seems to be undone.

Creation is beautiful – it declares God's glory. But our human condition means we struggle to see God's glory. Creation itself, as St Paul says in Romans, is groaning and subject to decay.

A recent example was in David Attenborough's - Life on Earth: struck by a picture of a leopard jumping on an antelope, its right claw embedded in its rear leg and its mouth about to be sunk into its back.

Creation itself is groaning: yet while Jeremiah describes the sky growing dark and the land desolate – *there is nevertheless a hint of hope - **I will not make a full end'*** God has not abandoned creation yet.

So my second point is the sky has grown dark.

My 3rd point is there is a rescue plan for creation.

You may have noticed in our Gospel reading, at Christ's death, the sky went dark. *Mk 15:33 'when it was noon, darkness came on the whole land until three in the afternoon'*.

This is crucifixion darkness – darkness like no other, when the '*light of the world*', '*the Word made flesh*' who created the world was extinguished on the cross.

And yet, as we saw in Jeremiah, this was not the end. At the end of Mark's gospel we read that '*the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom*'. God was opening a new way.

At the cross God delivering a rescue plan for creation. Jesus was the messiah to deliver the Jewish vision for a time of justice, peace and shalom, under God's rule, and where the lion would lie down with the lamb.

Yes, God's creation is obscured, the sky has gone dark. God's judgement has come on rebellious humans – but God has not abandoned humans or creation completely.

God's words in Genesis created the sky and earth to produce beauty and life. Now in Jesus, the original creating Word (made flesh) God redeems and restores the beauty again.

So my 3rd point is God has a rescue plan for creation.

The conclusion of this creation-tide series:

God created sky and earth. They are beautiful but disfigured by human sin and greed.

This is not only a practical thing like deforestation, or contaminated soil and air – but a spiritual thing – we have all disfigured God's Glory in us and in creation.

This is our messy world. A half-way house between beauty and decay – between caring for creation yet finding ourselves damaging it.

But as Alison reminded us in sermon 1 – when God speaks – new life emerges and dead life is resurrected. While death comes to us all - we remember that **Jesus is the resurrection and the life.**

The Christian story is about victory over death. So the best is yet to come – one day this broken creation will be renewed - and these broken bodies restored. This is our hope - and creation give us many clues....

When the light comes each day after darkness; when a flower blooms after winter; when the sun lifts the morning mist. These are all clues to a God who will restore his creation and rescue his people.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.