



Sermon preached by Faith Paulding on 13th September 2026

Readings: Genesis 1 v 20 – 2 v4; Psalm 104: 1-15 and 24-25; Job 38: 1-12

The Feast of Creation

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable unto you O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer.

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This morning, we have been wondering at the glory of creation. We talked earlier about the mathematics of creation and the balance, order, and structure that we can see in nature. We have also heard from Psalm 104, which praises the God who created this world – whilst the Psalmist doesn't use the language of the Fibonacci sequence, they do wonder at the expansiveness of the seas, the innumerable creatures that dwell in it, and praise the way that God cares for and maintains this world. It is God who creates, God who feeds living beings, the breath of God that both gives life and sustains it. God is both Creator and Sustainer.

Psalm 104 acknowledges and gives thanks and praise for the awe-inspiring, complex, fascinating nature of the world that has God's fingerprints all over it. We're going to compare this to some of the other images of creation that we see in the Bible and reflect on the place of humans within this world.

Genesis chapters one and two with their tales of the seven days of creation and the Garden of Eden are an obvious selection but there is also relevant material to be found in the Book of Job.

What is interesting about Psalm 104 is that humans aren't particularly important. Humans are mentioned in the Psalm, but in relation to eating plants, drinking wine, and going about their work; there is no connection between what humans do and the flourishing of the Earth around them. In this way there is a big difference to the Genesis creation stories. In Genesis 1, humans are the pinnacle of creation. We're the final act of creation and are given this divine order to subdue the Earth. I use the translation 'subdue' advisedly – the Hebrew word that is used here has violent connotations and is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe land or people being taken into one's possession, often by defeating or driving out enemies and asserting dominance. In Genesis 1, humans are created to sit near the top of the hierarchy, second only to God, and are given a command to dominate the rest of creation.

The story of Eden in Genesis 2 is rather less violent, but it still gives humans an important role to cultivate the garden and name – and thus have power over – all the living things within it. Both of the Genesis creation stories place humans above nature, but Psalm 104 doesn't. Humans are just an incidental part of creation in Psalm 104; it is God that is the one who waters the ground and feeds the animals.

Then there are chapters 38-41 in the Book of Job which go even further than Psalm 104. When God appears out of the whirlwind and gives Job an awe-inspiring tour of the universe, humans aren't even mentioned. Instead, God describes the act of creation and the care that God shows to wild animals – animals that live far away from humans. God doesn't hold back – Job is asked rather vicious questions like 'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the Earth?' and 'Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars? Is it at your command that the eagle makes its nest on high?'. In showing Job the wonders of creation that are separate from humans, God appears to be trying to take him down a peg or two.

What we have in all of these different depictions of creation are differing views of the relationship

between God, humanity, and the Earth. In Genesis 1, we have a hierarchical image, where God is at the top, and humans sit below God but above the Earth and are called to subdue the Earth and fill it. Genesis 2 still has a hierarchical image but framed in a slightly different way – God is at the top, humans sit below God, but humans have a responsibility to manage the Earth, to work the land, to name the animals. Psalm 104 and Job 38-41, however, portray a different relationship. God is obviously still at the top – that’s not going to change! – but there isn’t a hierarchy between humans and the rest of creation. Humans are created just like every other being. There is no special role, and all the things that Genesis suggests humans should do are done directly by God.

Within our Christian tradition, we usually focus on the Genesis creation stories rather than other passages, and a big reason for this is simply because they come first in our Bibles. Open your Bibles, and on page 1 it says ‘let humans have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle and all the wild animals’. That shapes the way we read the rest of the Bible, whether it’s conscious or not. We need to remember though, that the Bible wasn’t written as one book. It is a mosaic of texts and the order of these texts – and indeed, which texts are included and which are left out – was decided by councils of men long after the texts themselves were written. It is therefore completely valid to ask ourselves the question – what would happen if the books of the Bible were in a different order? Imagine for a moment that the Bible doesn’t begin with Genesis 1, or even Genesis 2. Imagine it begins with Psalm 104. Imagine it begins with the Book of Job. Then imagine that the depiction of creation that we get in those texts are what shape the way we read the rest of the Bible. What does this do to our thinking about the relationship between God, humanity, and the Earth?

The church talks a lot about stewardship and I deliberately chose the tune of the hymn prior to this reflection as it is called *Stewardship*. However, it’s worth remembering that stewardship is a metaphor – we are not literally stewards who have been appointed by a monarch to manage their estate in their absence! This image and metaphor have been used to help shape our thinking about the way that we treat God’s property – the Earth – and what we do in order to enable it to be productive and flourish. The introduction of ideas of stewardship did a lot to help the Church move away from the idea that we can have violent dominion over the Earth and towards a more responsible, caring attitude. However, now that we are becoming painfully aware of ecological breakdown and climate crisis, the question arises as to whether this metaphor is still the most helpful one, or would it be more appropriate to imagine the relationship between humans and the Earth in a different way.

The thing about the metaphor of stewardship is that it is and was, first and foremost, a financial metaphor. To be a steward is to manage property and money, and it came to be used in the church to also think about how we manage our time and our talents. It was therefore an image that the Church understood, and so it was a useful, already available metaphor that could then be used to think about the environment. As I’ve already said, it helped to move us beyond ideas of violent dominion, which is brilliant, but it is still rooted in a hierarchy – God, then humans, then the rest of creation. It treats the Earth as a resource, as a piece of property, that humans can manage and control, rather than something with intrinsic value and worth. Also, when you dig into the metaphor, it poses some other incongruity. It suggests that humans are necessary to look after the Earth – that we’ve been given this responsibility by God to care for the Earth and enable it to flourish. The fact is, though, that the Earth existed and flourished long before humans emerged in the evolutionary process, and we can even see today that some of the parts of the Earth that flourish the most are those parts that are least touched by human hands.

As Psalm 104 and Job 38-41 highlight, God is more than capable of sustaining the Earth. As Fibonacci and others have helped reveal, the structure of creation is far more intricate than we could ever fully

comprehend. Humans are not necessary and, if we were to vanish, the rest of the Earth isn't going to disappear.

This isn't to diminish the wonder and glory of human life. We are created in the image of God, and human creativity and imagination is not to be played down. The idea that we are made to be 'co-Creators' with God, however, can lead to a rather unbalanced view of human power. Yes, we are creative, but this is not God's creativity. We are simply working with what God has already made. It's a bit like we're sitting on the floor messing about with Play-Doh, making different shapes and squishing things into different forms, but simply working with what God has already made. What we can lose, when we focus only on the Genesis creation stories and the idea that we are co-Creators, is the fact that we are also co-creatures. We are created. We are creatures. We are not separate from the Earth, but another part of it. This moves our view of the relationship between humanity and the Earth from a vertical one to a more horizontal one, where we celebrate together that we are created and sustained by God.

The Bible has a lot to say about God as the Creator, but we often end up putting more weight on the Genesis creation stories and then these stories end up shaping how we view our relationship with the rest of the Earth. The fact is, though, that we can only glimpse the extent of God's creative power. We see it coming through in the symmetry of nature, in the balance of ecosystems and the structure of atoms, but there is without doubt far more there than any one of us can ever comprehend. We are part of this creation, not separate from it or with power over it.

The metaphors that we use to imagine our relationship with the Earth shape the way that we treat the world around us. How we act when we see ourselves as stewards of the Earth is, I would suggest, very different to the way we would act if we see ourselves as co-creatures with the rest of the Earth.

God calls us to live in relationship with the Creator through Jesus Christ and maybe it would be helpful if we also saw ourselves as being called to live in relationship with creation itself. Like any healthy relationship it should not be one that seeks to control, coerce or restrain but one which brings about harmony between all of its component parts.

Amen

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