

Sermon on Sunday 6 October 2024 (Creation Sunday) by Rev. Alan Stewart

Readings: Genesis 1. 26-31 & Mark 9. 35-37

Through the eyes of a child

Like you, perhaps, I grew up in more feral or free-range times. As a child in rural Ireland, I was free to roam the rivers, the forests and the fields unsupervised, until it got dark or until I got hungry. I loved mud-larking the riverbanks, inspecting flora and fauna, catching minnows, exploring derelict buildings and, my favourite - flicking cowpats with sticks! These were the days of curiosity and imagination where I could be Luke Skywalker one minute and Indiana Jones the next.

One of my favourite things to do was to sit on a large flat stone in the middle of the river near where I lived. And here, I did my thinking, my praying, my communing with something bigger than me. Here, I learnt about stillness and wonder and my interconnection with the water and the trees and the earth.

Maybe you've had similar moments of re-creation in this great Cathedral we call Creation.

Today is Creation Sunday, a day set aside to wonder and be grateful for this extraordinary planet we call home. It's a day to

reflect on our interconnectedness and our divine calling to be caretakers of Creation.

In our reading today, Jesus chooses a child to teach the adults about greatness. The grown-ups have been arguing about this, so Jesus confounds them by taking someone of the lowest status in that culture, a child, and saying, 'Learn greatness from them'.

There are so many great things we can learn from a child, but today I want to explore a few which relate to our relationship with Creation. The perspective of a child is, after all, as one close to the earth, literally. This natural closeness to nature is, sadly, I think, something we adults often grow out of.

The first thing children teach us is to get dirty; to dig in the mud, to splash in the puddles, to connect with the soil from which we came. It's an elemental and primal thing. We are, after all, made of the same stuff as the earth; stardust; atoms formed billions of years ago in dying stars.

When was the last time we got close to the earth, smelt and touched it; got the dirt of Creation beneath our fingernails?

Children teach us to be curious. Curious people are so good to be around. Their curiosity makes them rich. Walk for a while with a toddler and you will learn a lot about curiosity. They will be fascinated by the tiniest thing, find the unremarkable remarkable.

They're in absolutely no hurry to be somewhere else because all that matters is this slug, this stone, this spider's web.

When was the last time we stopped and stared, the last time we were intentionally curious about Creation?

Children teach us to be present. Children are natural contemplatives; they give their full and undivided attention to what is. Mystics call this the sacrament of the Present Moment because to be fully present is to know the grace of now.

When was the last time we gave our full and loving attention to this one precious moment; listening to the birdsong, feeling the wind on our face, touching the rough bark of a tree?

Children teach us to delight in the 'small things'; to take joy in kicking leaves or catching snowflakes. We call this 'wonder', and wonder is made up of two interconnected things; joy and gratitude.

When was the last time we delighted in small things, the last time we allowed ourselves space to wonder at Creation, the last time we gave thanks?

Children teach us to ask questions. I don't know about you, but when I think about what our species is doing to our planet, I feel helpless and hopeless, and I want to just bury my head. I'm afraid to ask difficult questions of myself and my lifestyle.

When was the last time we questioned our consumer choices? A few weeks ago, Maria gave us a great framework to reflect on this. Check it out in the sermons online.

Children teach us to be humble. That's the reason Jesus chose a child in the first place to redress the disciples' ideas of status. Children are teachable, they have beginner's minds, a growth mindset. Jesus told his disciples that true greatness was to be the servant of all. And this servanthood extends to Creation, to brother/sister Earth. In the story-poem of Genesis, humankind is called to be the caretaker, not the owner, of the earth. There's an American First Nation proverb that says, 'We don't inherit the earth; we borrow it from our children'.

A child is also one who will grow and hopefully live beyond our years. So, can we honour that future in our actions towards the earth and those future generations who will borrow it after us? How can we determine to leave more gentle footprints upon the earth?

This earth, this beautiful Creation, is not only our brother/sister, it is, in fact, part of us, and its future and the future of generations to come is in our hands.

So, may we pray to know deeply our interconnectedness, knowing that caring for the earth is caring for ourselves and for those who will follow us.

May we learn to look at Creation with the eyes of a child, with curiosity and with wonder. May we rise to our divine calling to care. May we have the vision and the courage we need to change what we need to change. And may we commit to justice for this extraordinary and beautifully fragile planet we call home. Amen

