

Sunday September 1, 2024 Season of Creation

Romans 8:19-26

¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰ for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; ²³ and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in ^[a] hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes ^[b] for what is seen? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Paul, in our reading from Romans, in a rather startling move both personifies and feminizes the creation, and the Earth we inhabit. The creation “waits with eager longing” as a mother groaning as if with labour pains while giving birth (Rom 8:22). The notion of “Mother Earth” is widespread in many indigenous cultures and we are also familiar with it from Francis of Assisi who used this language of the Earth as our sister and our mother.

Humanity is now shockingly aware that we have mistreated our Mother, abused her, exploited her not as one with whom we intimately relate in gratitude but as a resource to be used.

“Creation groans” (Rom 8:22) because of our selfishness and unsustainable actions that harm it. Together with our Sister, Mother Earth, creatures of all kinds, including humans, cry out because of our destructive actions that cause climate crises, biodiversity loss and human suffering, as well as Creation’s suffering.

Climate change describes a long-term shift in weather patterns around the world, which have been rapidly accelerating since the 1800s due to human activity. Examples of climate change include rising global temperatures, the melting of the polar ice caps, and an increasing loss of biodiversity.

“We’ve changed the planet, changed it in large and fundamental ways. Our old familiar globe is suddenly melting, drying, acidifying, flooding, and burning in ways that no human has ever seen.” — Bill McKibben

State of climate video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vbq7qjAfZow>

Norman Habel and the Earth Bible Project have identified six principles in scripture:

1. **The Principle of Intrinsic Worth:** The universe, Earth, and all its components have intrinsic worth/value
2. **The Principle of Interconnectedness:** Earth is a community of inter-connected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival.
3. **The Principle of Voice:** Earth is a living entity capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice.
4. **The Principle of Purpose:** The universe, Earth and all its components are a part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall structure.
5. **The Principle of Mutual Custodianship:** Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners with, rather than rulers over, Earth to sustain its balance and a diverse Earth community.
6. **The Principle of Resistance:** Earth and its components not only suffer from human injustices but actively resist them in the struggle for justice.

Climate justice is a term that we are hearing more of. It expresses the reality that the impacts of global climate change and the work of responding to it are not borne equally. Impoverished, Indigenous, coastal and island peoples experience the greatest impacts while bearing the least responsibility and are at the forefront of movements for land defense, mutual aid, and corporate and governmental accountability (Gabbatis and Tandon, 2022). Bringing a climate justice approach to scripture means focusing not simply on “creation” or “the environment” but addressing the interrelationships between human and ecological exploitation, extraction, displacement, and inequity.

I took biology as my HSC (year 12) subject and our text book was called The Web of Life. Well, the web of life is unraveling before our eyes. Human society is at risk of collapse within decades along with mass extinctions of species and forced migrations

But Christians are a people of hope. To hope in the biblical sense does not mean to remain still and silent, oh well we will just hold on to a vague wish that things may get better. No it is active, and according to Paul will lead us to groan, to cry out and actively strive for a new life in the midst of difficulties. Creation and all of us are called to worship the Creator, working together for a dynamic future based on hope and action. Only when we work together with Creation can the firstfruits of hope spring forth. As in childbirth, we go through a period of intense pain, but new life emerges.

That's why Romans 8 speaks so powerfully into our current climate of despair and hopelessness. It recognises the mess we're in, 'our present sufferings' (v.18) and the 'frustration' and 'groaning' of creation (vs.20, 22). Real hope begins with lamenting our current hopeless situation, neither exaggerating nor down-playing how bad it is but facing the facts of the groaning of creation and the cries of the poor. Lament cries out to God,

Yet, the emphasis of Romans 8 is not on creation's groaning but on its 'eager expectation' (v.19). The groaning of creation is a pregnant expectation, as is our own groaning (v.23) when we bring it to God. The 'pains of childbirth' (v.22) may be agonising but they are filled with the hope of new life to come. That hope is made explicit in Romans 8:21: "the creation itself will be liberated from its

bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.” This suffering and groaning world will be set free, released from its chains. Creation will give birth to new creation, not ‘new’ in the sense of replaced but ‘new’ in the deeply biblical sense of renewed, restored, redeemed, recycled. This is a hope that is guaranteed and certain, because it is based on the character, actions and promises of God. It tells us that, however bad things get, there will be a day when Christ returns to renew and restore all things.

hope is like a muscle. If we do not use our muscles, they waste and become useless. But if we exercise them regularly, they grow. Hope is a muscle that grows as we use it. It is important for us to celebrate our hope for creation as part of our liturgy, our corporate worship, our personal prayer life. But it is also important that we turn our hope into action at the personal, local, national and International levels.

Our theme for Season of Creation 2024 is ‘To hope and act with Creation’. That small word ‘with’ is significant. Creation is already waiting in eager expectation. Creation is already groaning in pregnant longing. In one English translation, Romans 8:19 reads “The entire universe is standing on tiptoe, yearning to see the unveiling of God's glorious sons and daughters!”

According to the [United Kingdom-based Energy Institute](#), fossil fuels’ share of the world’s energy mix has declined only marginally, from about 86 percent in 2012 to 82 percent last year. So while we are producing more renewables humans are not at anywhere near the required rate phasing out fossil fuels. Just adding renewables.

. We live now in anticipation of his glorious return, and we are called to acts of prophetic anticipation – seeking to demonstrate our eternal and ultimate hope. We are to plant trees, resist single-use plastics, conserve biodiversity, seek green technologies, treat fellow creatures with compassion, ensure climate justice for all. We do all these, not just because we can save the world by doing them, but as acts of worship in hope, that Christ will take our humble offerings and transform them as part of the renewal and restoration of all things. Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus!