

## **Season of Creation One: Earth**

**1<sup>st</sup> September, 2024**

One day, about six weeks ago, I noticed a plant growing that I didn't recognise. It didn't look like any weed I knew, so I decided to let it be until it had grown a little. This it has done at a prodigious rate, producing enormous leaves along the way. The growth smacked of the Day of the Triffids, so I determined the time had come to check out my monster on an app I have on my phone called "Plantnet". It turns out that my plant is a Giant Pumpkin. It is now about five feet or one and a half metres long. The point is, I didn't plant it. It must have come via a bird or in some compost. The seed sat in the earth and in due course, the earth nurtured it into life.

This Sunday and for the next four weeks, leading up to our Harvest Festival on September 29<sup>th</sup>, we are celebrating the "Season of Creation," a fairly new season in the Church of England but one that has been around for over forty years in other churches. We will focus on one part of creation each Sunday. Today it is Earth. But the overarching focus of this whole series will be on those texts where the Word is the impulse that summons forth creation, evokes praise from creation and stirs life in creation. And by Creation, I don't just mean that out there. That same Word is acting in you and me all the time.

It might help you to look at your first reading, the Genesis reading, in your bulletin. We think of God as creating the earth – and indeed He does in terms of the earth we recognise. But look again at verse 2. In the beginning the earth is already there, a bare rock, 'void and empty'. All is darkness and earth is located under the waters of the deep. Later, in verse 9 it is clear that Earth emerges from beneath these waters, like a baby being born. But at the beginning, the character called Earth is waiting below, waiting to be developed by God. And God's spirit or wind hovers over the waters that cover the Earth.

When I first saw my Giant Pumpkin and didn't know what it was, I decided to let it be. I let the earth grow it. It didn't need my help! Look how from verse 3, God says over and over again, "Let" – allow - "Let there be." From the beginning God works with the power that is in the earth. God requests Earth

to be a co-creator. He summons Earth to bring forth vegetation. God does not say, 'Plants and trees and flowers appear!' like a magician. No, He says, "Let there be". Earth is the mediator from whom all plant life appears at God's prompting. Earth is the physical source of life.

Similarly, on Day Six, God does not say 'Animals and reptiles - Appear'! Rather, God again speaks to Earth, "Let there be", and directs Earth to bring forth animal life. This means, in effect, that Earth is a mother from whom all life emerges at the impulse of God's word. From the beginning God's word calls forth the agency that is in Earth. Earth is a main character in the story of Genesis One, a character who first comes forth from the water and then brings forth life.

The texts for this Sunday are full of the "agency" of the Earth, the power to respond, to do, to communicate, to act. The Earth in these texts collaborates with God in creation and finally the earth produces the first human, Adam. Looking over all He has created God deems what earth and waters have done to be good, the Jewish word is "tov," meaning not only aesthetic goodness but also moral goodness. Earth feeds the physical and the spiritual.

And so, we come to our wondrous, beautiful and breathtaking gospel today: part of the first chapter of John. The extraordinary happens. "Flesh" becomes the form of God's own self in the world. Flesh, the cellular, material, organic, molecular material of all earth creatures made from the elements of Stardust, created at the Big Bang over 13.5 billion years ago—this material becomes the body of one whom we know as Jesus Christ; the same material that makes up our bodies.

I found this anonymous quotation. *"The climax to the reading from John One is the amazing Christ connection in verse 14. This eternal Word that precedes creation becomes part of creation. This Word, that is the very God who brought Earth into being, becomes part of Earth as 'flesh and blood'! This God that caused Earth to be born out of primal water, is now born from the waters of a woman."*

Held together, these and other texts of which the Bible is full, draw us down paths largely untrodden by modern Western humans. We commonly assume

that a distinguishing characteristic of humankind is our capacity for hearing, heeding, and teaching who God is. These texts and our history of misunderstanding and misusing nature, animals, the earth itself, suggests otherwise. There has been an arrogant assumption of our power and cleverness in our ability to manipulate the earth and all that is in it. We have been ignorant or have forgotten that we, too, are creatures, dependent on the earth, dependent on our Creator. Human beings may look small and insignificant when compared with the size of our planet. Yet, like termites destroying a house, we are changing the very face and future of our planet.

If you are old enough you will remember the reaction of wonder we had when we first saw planet Earth in that photograph taken from space on Christmas Eve 1968; part of our wondrous blue planet in light as the sun rose. Part of it still in the darkness of night and sleep. That photograph changed our relationship with our world forever. It felt as if we were looking at the earth from God's point of view, full of mystery, full of beauty and full of potential.

If we look now our reactions might be very different.

A recent NASA photograph showed that the image of our planet is changing. The Arctic ice cap is shrinking. Scientists predict that within a century the Arctic region may be ice-free. Then what of polar bears, seals and other life?

But all is not lost. New life-giving possibilities for understanding and respecting the roles of the flora and fauna with whom we share our world are emerging as we attempt to relinquish the human self-centred blinkered-ness we have suffered from for far too long. We are listening to other ancient cultures. We are learning to cultivate receptivity to hearing the voice of God in the other-than-human parts of nature, learning from these voices how to live rightly, justly, lovingly. If we can do so, there is hope that we can move toward a world in which humankind is not toxic to our planetary home and in which none amass wealth or power at the cost of others' impoverishment or degradation.

The message has always been there in our Bible. That we, like everything else that God created from the beginning, have it within us to co-create with God; to bring forth life. At the beginning God invited humankind into a very special role, to take care of the Earth and to protect it, so that Earth could continue to bring forth life. When we failed, again and again, God's Self entered into the

very substance of the universe God had created in the person of Jesus Christ, the very substance of which we are made, flesh, to show us the way to care and to tend God's world.

Perhaps, during the Season of Creation, our prayer should be very simple.

“Lord, you made me to be a co-creator with you and have given me the gifts to care for the earth. Show me what I can do.”