**Genesis 1:24-2:4**

**The glory of creation**

Today, we are thinking about the glory of God’s creation, joining in with many other people as they celebrate Earth Day today.

For those who may not have heard of it, Earth Day is an annual celebration on 22 April, and call to action, that has been taking place for nearly 50 years now. Earth Day is a global event: more than 1 billion people participate across 192 countries. There are celebrations, marches to Government buildings, petitions signed, trees are planted, litter picks happen, and politicians respond by announcing new ecological measures and targets. It is a hugely important day of the year and this year, not surprisingly, the focus of Earth Day is Plastic Pollution across the globe.

All of us, I’m sure, are only too aware of the terrible situation in which we find ourselves with regard to Plastic Pollution. The images that we see on the TV are horrifying. The statistics and data almost incomprehensible. 8 million tons of plastic enter the oceans each year, which is the equivalent of emptying a fully loaded rubbish truck of plastic into the ocean every single minute of the year. It is estimated that there is more microplastic in the oceans than there are stars in the Milky Way. 1 in 3 species of marine mammals have been found entangled in marine litter and 80% of marine litter is plastic.

The statistics go on and on…it’s a terrible situation. And it is wonderful that individuals, companies and Governments are now waking up to the reality and being proactive in response. But as Chris Packham said on the One Show this week, Governments cannot stop plastic pollution: only *we* can stop it by reducing our own usage of plastic and recycling properly. As grateful as we are to Michael Gove, the Environment Secretary, and his team, it is not his responsibility to save the planet from Plastic Pollution. It is our responsibility – and we must change how we behave and what we buy. This is God’s world – this is God’s beautiful world – and we are merely stewards of it for this generation.

And why did God create the world in the first place? The answer is very simple: to reveal his glory.

So much of our lives is spent engaging with social media. But God has the greatest social media of all. It’s not a Facebook Profile, its not Instagram. He’s not on Pinterest. God’s social media is creation itself; the created order, the whole cosmos, is God’s social media. It’s how he makes himself known to us all. Psalm 19 starts with these words: “How clearly the sky reveals God’s glory! How plainly it shows what he has done!” Creation itself is the ultimate social media for God

Through creation, God does not whisper to us, or hint about how wonderful he is. Through creation God shouts out his glory to us. “How clearly the sky reveals God’s glory!”

Every time we look out the window, every time we look at the sky, every time we watch the waves of the sea or the rolling landscapes of the countryside, God is shouting to us of how glory. Whatever the season of the year, whether there is hail, sunshine or snow, God speaks to us of his creativity and love, his power and his compassion.

The language of creation is the language of God. God speaks, and creation happens: that’s what we read throughout Genesis 1. ‘God said, “Let there be light”, and there was light…’ and so on. And when the apostle Paul was preaching the Gospel in Lystra, what did he say? Acts 14:17: “[God] has always given evidence of his existence by the good things he does: he gives you rain from heaven and crops at the right times; he gives you food and fills your hearts with happiness.” Creation proclaims the glory of God: that is its sole purpose.

Now, exactly how God created the world is subject to much debate, of course, and the Bible doesn’t really help us to find an answer to this. The Bible is not a Science Manual – it has a different purpose altogether. Genesis chapters 1 and 2 do not try to present a scientific account of creation: they were written with a different purpose in mind.

Genesis 1 was probably written in the 6th-C BC, when the people of Israel were in exile in Babylon. And there was a Babylonian myth about how their gods had created the world that was in the form of a poem. And so Genesis 1 was written as a sort of ‘counter-claim’: you Babylonians think your gods created the world but actually, our God created the world. And Genesis 1 is written in the style of a poem that matches the claims of the Babylonian myth, so it’s a sort of ‘My God is better than your God’ poem.

Now, that’s not to say that God didn’t create the world in 6 days: maybe he did. But the purpose of Genesis 1 is not actually to tell us scientific fact. Instead, it is a claim to the greatness of our God above all gods. So we don’t need to worry about whether or not this is a literal account.

Instead, what we learn from this part of Scripture is the glorious, all-powerful nature of God and the fact that we, as human beings, find our meaning in life in relation to the rest of creation.

God made us in his own image and then he immediately placed us into a relationship with the rest of the created order. Verse 26 we heard read a few minutes ago: God says of human beings, “Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

Now, we can come at this verse from dozens of different angles, but undeniably, we are remember our context in creation and that we can only fully understand ourselves as we relate to the created order. If I do not locate myself within the created order, I will only be able to live my life in reference to myself as if I truly am the centre of the Universe. If I don’t locate myself in relationship with everything else that is created, my ego will become inflated and I will think that every decision I make, every action I perform should revolve around me. And furthermore, I will expect the people around me to treat me as if I am the centre of the Universe. But I am not the centre of the Universe: I am just one small part of an extraordinary network that incorporates galaxies near and far, billions of people, and the history of a cosmos that stretches back to the dawn of time. All the while I allow my ego to inflate my position in the created order, I cannot find true meaning in life because I will be living an egotistical lie.

It really is not all about you. It really is not all about me.

It really is all about God – and we need to find our true place in relation to God and his creation if we are to find true meaning and true purpose.

And so, as we mark Earth Day today, we reflect on the fact that, as Christians, we have a two-fold relationship with creation: Responsibility and Accountability.

What is the oldest profession in the world? No, it’s not what you think it is! The oldest profession in the world is landscape gardening. The Biblical poem in Genesis 1 tells us that created the world and then immediately created human beings and his first words to humans was this: verse 28: “Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control…” Landscape gardening on a massive scale!

God creates us and then immediately gives us the responsibility of shaping his creation, bringing order into it, bringing it under control. If we do not live our lives in such a way that we are caring for creation, we are dishonouring God in a terrible way. It would be like saying how much we admire Rembrandt whilst at the same time ripping up one of his paintings. We cannot say that we love God if we are not going to live our lives attempting to follow the very first command he gave us, which is to care responsibly for his creation.

Yes, God has given us dominion over creation - but dominion is not the same thing as domination. We do not have license to rape the resources of the planet. We do not have license to destroy rain forests for our own comfort and luxury. We do not have license to bring harm and suffering to marine just so that we can drink a bottle of water and throw it carelessly away. We have been given a sacred responsibility to care for the world God gives us.

God speaks in anger about this in Ezekiel 34:18 when he says this: “Some of you are not satisfied with eating the best grass; you even trample down what you don’t eat! You drink the clear water and muddy what you don’t drink! My other sheep have to eat the grass you trample down and drink the water you muddy.”

It is unacceptable to God that we mistreat his creation and thereby bring suffering and pain to others. We absolutely have a responsibility to do better…

How do we do that in a practical way?

I was reading a Blog post this week in which the writer suggested that we need to do CPR on the planet. What did he mean by CPR? Three things…

C means we are to Clean creation as much as possible; keep our air, land and water as clean as we can, free from pollution in any form.

P means we are to Pick Up the rubbish where we see it, without just walking past, thinking someone else will do it.

R means we should Recycle so that our trash can be used in a more constructive way after we have finished with it.

CPR. Clean. Pick Up. Recycle.

A few years ago, when I was Vicar in Stratford, East London, my house was broken into and I was burgled. I don’t know if any of you have experienced this, but it really is such a soul-destroying feeling; walking into your house to see windows smashed, drawers turned out, the carpet soiled, ornaments broken and items missing. It’s a horrible feeling. And I reckon that is how God feels when he sees how we are mistreating his creation; that sinking feeling in his heart as we trash his home. It cannot go on. As humans, we have a responsibility to care for God’s creation and he will hold us accountable for our actions.

Where does it start? Not with Michael Gove, the Environment Secretary. Not with the organizers of Earth Day. Not with the politicians meeting to discuss Plastic Pollution at the Heads of the Commonwealth Summit. It starts with me. It starts with you.

What are we going to do to make this world a better place? How can we perform CPR on Planet Earth?

We simply cannot glorify the Creator whilst, at the same time, treating his creation with contempt. It starts with me. It starts with you.

Together, let’s rise to the challenge.

I want to finish with a prayer from an ancient holy man called Brendanus Scotus:

Come Lord Christ, king of the earth,

lead us as we walk with you

that the earth may be healed.

Come, Holy Spirit hovering over the water

and guide us as we sail to you,

that the waters may flow with life.

Come, you angels of the fire and light

and show us how to dance with you,

that in the light may be born

the flame of love.

Come, you breath of the air,

and inspire us with the breath of you,

that the air may reverberate with

the sound of the word.

Come, Lady Mary and the saints of heaven

and help us to pray with you,

that the earth may be redeemed through

the love of Christ. Amen.