

Reflection for Sunday 11th October

Let the land produce living creatures and Let us make humankind in our own image.

Genesis 1 v 24-31

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and 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."

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Psalms 139 v 1-18 and 1 Corinthians 11 v 17-22

Reflection by Revd Becky based on Ruth Valerio Saying Yes to Life chapter 6

In this last reflection about Creation we focus on the verses from Genesis, in which we hear of the creatures of the land and humankind being brought to life. The words used signify that everything had and has the *breathe* of life or the *soul* of life within them. We are asked to notice the breadth of variety of creatures included. If all creation and creatures are made with God's breath, all creation is animated by God; therefore the whole of creation has the capacity for worship, to know God's provision and to be cared for.

So does scripture describe any differences between humanity and the rest of creation? Yes and No! The Genesis authors use the term 'Elohim' (the Royal we) who creates us. However, humans are created on the same day as other land creatures and are given the same blessing as the animals to go forth and multiply. The key difference is that humans are described as being created 'in the image of God.' We are created like a parent creates a child and that child is representative of their features and character. We are held by God just like a parent would 'beholden' a child and the child would respond to that gaze. (Bolcher).

For some early 20th century scientists, the difference between humanity and the rest of creation concerned the human ability to have self-conscious reason. We know now that Octopuses and some primates can self-reflect. (I would recommend reading '*Other Minds*' by Peter Godfrey Smith).

There are many animals in scripture. From the Sunday school favourite Noah's ark to the Raven who fed the prophet Elijah, the giant fish that vomited out Jonah, and an amusing story of Balaam's Donkey who is more aware of God than his master! In ancient tribal culture humans would have lived closely alongside animals both domestic and wild. Jesus was laid in an animal feeding trough in the story of his birth, he was with the wild animals in his wilderness temptations. He talks metaphorically about sheep and wolves, snakes, dogs, to describe actions we should take and personalities that are not just. He talks of mother hens and their chicks to describe God's shelter and embrace. Images from the natural world help us to understand ourselves and God. We share the same home as the whole of creation. We share our world with the wonderfully strange, colourful, funny, cuddly, scary, scaly, tiny, or gigantic creatures that we could imagine- from a mole with a star-shaped nose to a tiny primate that can turn its head 180 degrees!

- How aware of you of having the same home as the whole of creation when you think about where your food comes from or what meat you eat?

Other creation stories (including the story of Marduk from the Babylonians) depict humanity as slaves of the Gods. Genesis depicts humans with dignity and worth '*made in the image of God*'. We therefore need to treat



others with the same dignity and worth. When we face another human we should demonstrate justice, mercy and humility. Kathryn Greene- McCreight states 'there is no true humanity without other creatures of God'. In our reading from 1 Corinthians, St Paul criticizes the Corinthian community for disunity, for treating others as less than themselves and not sharing at the communion table.

- *The extent to which we fail to reflect the image of God in our lives is the extent to which we have become less human...* What do you think?

The final chapter of Ruth Valerio's book contains a reflection about REST for on the seventh day God rested. As we conclude our Creationtide reflections we say YES to enabling creation to rest from overconsumption and climate change by the actions we continue to take that can support its rest.

- What actions will you personally take to ensure that our planet can REST?

HYMN REFLECTION by MJS

At the end of the Creation Season, in this excellent hymn we first read of the circling planets wheeling on their way into infinity, and then turn our attention to matters nearer home. The eternal ruler of the planets is the ruler of our lives, too, and the hymn prays that he might guide us to be at one with him and with each other. Every line means something, and could by itself be the subject of a sermon. The words were written by J.W.Chadwick (1840-1904). If anybody is ever minded to follow up these reflections with their own research, be careful here; there were two J.W.Chadwicks, who both wrote hymns. We are thinking of the American one, who was a Unitarian Minister. Some hymn books alter the second line of the second verse, but the new A & M sticks with brothers, not "kindred" or "by virtue of".

The hymn has been sung to various tunes, including the one to *Christians awake, salute the happy morn*, but the majority of hymn books use Orlando Gibbons' *Song 1*, preferably in the key of F, not G. Gibbons was one of the great English composers of the 17th century. Except for the very first syllable, this tune is an ideal match for the words. The combination gives us a hymn which is dignified, easy to understand and to sing, the ideal congregational hymn.

Eternal ruler of the ceaseless round
Of circling planets singing on their way;
Guide of the nations, from the night profound
Into the glory of the perfect day;
Rule in our hearts, that we may ever be
Guided and strengthened and upheld by thee.

We are of thee, the children of thy love,
The brothers of thy well-belovèd Son;
Descend, O Holy Spirit, like a dove
Into our hearts, that we may be as one:
As one with thee, to whom we ever tend;
As one with him, our Brother and our Friend.

We would be one in hatred of all wrong,
One in our love of all things sweet and fair,
One with the joy that breaketh into song,
One with the grief that trembleth into prayer,
One in the power that makes the children free
To follow truth, and thus to follow thee.

O clothe us with thy heavenly armour, Lord,
Thy trusty shield, thy sword of life divine;
Our inspiration be thy constant word;
We ask no victories that are not thine;
Give or withhold, let pain or pleasure be;
Enough to know that we are serving thee.