

Season of Creation: Storm Sunday

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3C : Psalm 29

Have you ever been out in a huge storm? Were you unsafe? What or who was your greatest concern? Did you understand what was happening – were you mentally prepared? Do the children you know have any idea about surviving storms?

Look at this picture of a dust storm sweeping east across Melbourne; 8th Feb 1983. I vividly remember the moment when that dust storm hit. I was teaching at Footscray TAFE College. We had no warning of what was coming; within a matter of seconds, broad daylight outside suddenly turned into an eerie, howling reddish darkness. It was quite terrifying. I remember stories friends told me later – stories about frightened people they'd seen dropping to their knees in the street and tearfully praying. For some, it seemed clear that the end of the world had come.



Storms can provoke very deep feelings in us. They can do it even when we know the science – the way lightning and thunder are produced, where all that rain comes from, and how it sometimes transforms itself into devastating hail. We know all this. And the picture of that tremendous dust storm reminds us that we know the effect we have on the nature of some storms. If you combine land-clearing, over-grazing, old-style ploughing and deep drought then add a 100 km/h wind, like that afternoon in 1983, it can become something like a 500 km wide apocalypse.

We're emotionally engaged with storms. They bring some of us to places of fear, depression, remorse, or for some of us, exultation – emotions often associated with our spiritual condition. For the ancients, a storm carried both the fear of destruction and the promise of blessing – the welcome rains after a long dry. So are we spiritually connected with God by storms, through awe, through fear, through hope and through the reminder that the vast energy of the universe is not under

our control? Today, we've heard two different accounts of storms and faith, Ps 29 and the Gospel. Let's look at the Psalm.

The psalmist calls the Heavens and the Earth to hear God's voice in storms. We hear God's voice in the noise, the power and the destructive force of storms, and we join the rest of creation in feeling fear, awe, regret, or maybe wild joy and hope in the greatness of God who promises us the blessing of a fertile Earth, softened at last by the rain.

Maybe we have difficulties connecting with something so primordial and alien to our perspective. We're not the first. This Psalm was actually a re-writing of an ancient hymn to Baal, the Canaanite storm god. The original was likely to have been a prayer or song which – with the help of some money or gift – would appease the anger of this god of storms. The Psalmist's rewrite has taken on this protection-racket and set out to free people from slavery to such a capricious system.

Instead, our psalmist proclaims the God whose grace doesn't depend on people's willingness to pay; our psalmist proclaims the God who's not confined by our ideas of what's invulnerable – neither the cedars of Lebanon nor even the Lebanon itself. Nor is God confined to blessing only those who are worthy (as Jesus says, God sends the rain on the just and the unjust ^{Mt.}

^{5:45}). God is the one who, come what may, is going to bring about the ancient promise to Abram and Sarah; the promise that through them, God will bless all families of Earth. This is a promise of spiritual blessing, but 'families of Earth' is also explicitly physical – a blessing we experience through our senses; a blessing lived most truly when we are living in harmony with Earth.

One of the principles of Earth Bible scholarship is that Earth has a voice. Another Psalm, Psalm 19 describes that as a voice from the heavens which *have no speech nor words ... yet their*

voice goes out through all the Earth and their words to the end of the world. ^{Ps 19.3-4} *Rant alert.* As we've

acknowledged over the past two weeks, the world's Indigenous peoples have always been attuned to that voice, living in harmony with Earth.

Indigenous peoples have indeed been that voice crying out against the injustice of colonization. And they are still crying out today; putting the Earth's teaching about God's grace into words that we could understand if we would only listen; warning us of the danger of our alienation from Earth. But we don't listen. Far worse, we are still deliberately silencing Indigenous people's voices; dividing to conquer, or making laws that imprison them in *our* alienation from the Land – their Land. Two weeks ago the Queensland government quietly extinguished the native title rights of the Wangan and Jagalingou people over their traditional lands. Shortly afterwards, the people received notices of trespass from a foreign mining company.

The dust storms that used to be so frequent taught us something, you'd hope. But you have to wonder. Will anyone hear Earth's voice speaking through unheard-of early spring firestorms? Earth has a voice; Earth is speaking. But we are strangely deaf to warning voices. We are becoming steadily more alienated from plain reality. We must do better than a minister for drought and water resources who says talk of human-induced climate change is irrelevant to the fire conditions in Qld and NSW.

We're into our third week now of exploring an ecological spirituality – how our spiritual life (our relationship with the divine) is deeply shaped by our relationship with nature; our exposure to nature and our attitude to nature. This Season of Creation is a time for us children of Earth to remember our first calling; that's our God-given responsibility to manage, serve and care for the Earth community. ^{Gen 1-3} This is

reinforced in our calling as children of Abraham and Sarah to be God's means of blessing to *all families of Earth*. ^{Gen 12.1-3} Our actions are spiritually significant; the way we deal with our Earth family constitutes our service to God who calls us to care and to bless. And Earth has a voice in this. Today we've remembered hearing Earth's voice in storms; remembered our feelings of bewilderment, isolation and helplessness, or maybe wild exultation. May our memories of hearing Earth's voice remind us to keep listening carefully; listen and respond to God's call; obediently, humbly, gratefully and with courage.

Amen