

Season of Creation: Cosmos Sunday

Rev'd Peter Balabanski

4C: Colossians 1 15-20

When I was nine years old, I persuaded my Dad to lay his camera on top of our ladder in the back yard one night and take a photo of the Southern Cross. He used slide film so projecting the picture, we'd see a bigger, closer Southern Cross. He set the camera to open the shutter automatically and take a time-exposure shot. That way, there'd be no finger shake, and the stars should come out clear and bright.

When I finally saw the slide, my first reaction was disappointment. The stars didn't come out as points of light, but as short lines. I felt better when I was told they were lines because of the spinning of Earth. The other thing that struck me was that stars come in different colours. There are three bluish-white stars, a red one and an orange one. The pointers are blue too – and the nearest one is a double star. So I started to learn about hot and cool stars, young and old ones, and binary stars.

But my biggest surprise about the Southern Cross was to come many years later. Down the bottom of the Yorke Peninsula, you can still see the Milky Way very clearly. Looking at the Southern Cross one night, a friend got me to look not at the stars but at the spaces. Could I see the huge Spirit Emu with its head just below the cross – did I know that's what Aboriginal people see?



I was thus introduced to a totally different perspective on the cosmos – how in the ancient dreaming, life on Earth is

spiritually connected with the universe. That book I've been quoting by Bruce Pascoe is called *Dark Emu*. By calling his book by that name, he's saying that he's entrusting his readers with the perspective of the Aboriginal People – the perspective of a people whose life and culture has always been profoundly and consciously interwoven with Earth and Heaven – a people who see life where we don't; where we just see emptiness.

This takes us again to the theme I've been emphasising throughout this year's Season of Creation; the opposites – interconnection and alienation. I continue to discover more and more how the traditional life of Indigenous peoples is one of deep connection with the natural order and with the numinous – the spiritual dimension of life. There is no sharp dividing line between physical and spiritual life in traditional cultures. Everything is interconnected.

By contrast, our culture is becoming increasingly one of alienation; physical and spiritual alienation from the natural world, and from each other. I've said a couple of times now that this alienation is a working definition of sin. Its marker is spiritual blindness – whether wilful or born of ignorance; spiritual blindness, whose consequence is alienation from each other, from the created order, and from God. It leads to death; both our own death, and the death we are inflicting on more and more of non-human life. The result of this sin is that we are in crisis, and because of the influence we have over our environment, the whole created order is in crisis too.

So what do we do? How do we address this? On Friday, we saw the young people of the world rise up and demand change. Our children are frightened for their lives; they're also angry at the obdurate stupidity – the wilful blindness – the greedy deafness – of those who claim the authority to run the world, yet who are allowing the destruction of nature for profit.

On Friday, for anyone with ears to hear, our children demanded something that our Christian faith teaches. They reminded us that the way to deal with the power of sin is repentance; turning around; turning from death to life; turning to follow the Way to life. Our children are calling us to turn to Life. That's what repentance means.

You can quite reasonably ask me if I am saying this as a Christian teacher or just as a committed environmentalist. Am I just co-opting my faith to make it serve my greenie passions? Does anything in Scripture authorise Christian environmentalists to speak the way I've been doing over the past weeks? As it happens, we heard that very Scripture today. We just shared in the Colossians hymn. I picked out a few sentences from it in my weekly – they're in bold print on the back of the pewsheet. Let's consider the first three sentences. The first two say

In Christ all things in heaven and on earth were created.

All things have been created through him and for him. v.16

So this hymn teaches that the natural order belongs to Christ alone.

The third sentence says – ***In him all things hold together.*** v.17

So this hymn also teaches that the interconnectedness of the natural order is the result of Christ's agency and will. What these words say to me – Christ's ownership of the natural order and his will to sustain it – these words tell me that a failure to care for the natural order is a failure to respect the will of Christ. This has practical spiritual consequences.

Standing by while the environment is destroyed has the effect of shutting others off from encountering God. Paul wrote in Rom 1.20, *Ever since God created the world, his invisible*

qualities, both his eternal power and his divine nature, have been clearly seen; they are perceived in the things that God has made. As we look on, human civilization is destroying those very things. Vicky writes about this.

Experiencing the majesty of the natural world, in all its diversity and strangeness, its symbiosis and complexity, is becoming a rare and precious thing – the stuff of eco-tourism and World Heritage sites. Wild places are now packaged and marketed, to manage the tourist footprint. The velvety depth of the night sky unencumbered by artificial lights is now, for very many, a memory. ...

If Christ embodies and reveals the invisible God in and through the natural world, this means of revelation is also becoming increasingly rare and precious. How are future generations going to glimpse the numinous, except artificially, in pre-packaged portions? As we allow the diminishment of species and ecosystems, we diminish our ability – and the ability of future generations – to perceive the glory of God. This can no longer be peripheral to those who love Christ. See VSB, [Colossians: An Eco-Stoic Reading](#)

On Friday, our children called us to action – to repentance and action. Today, our scriptures tell us they spoke the Truth in Christ. How are we, as a parish, going to respond?
Amen