# Season of Creation: Flora and Fauna Sunday

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2C : Job 38, Ps 104, 1st Cor 1, Lk 12

As children, we grew up in something of a botanical menagerie. Mum filled the yards with trees, shrubs, bonsais, mosses and ground cover, and her glass house was stocked with an incredible variety of plants and cuttings taken from roadsides wherever we walked or drove. But even that wasn’t enough for her. She and a like-minded neighbour would lie in wait until any local house went on the market. The moment it was vacant, they’d launch a green-thumb commando raid, planting all manner of things in those gardens too. So our old street now looks utterly different from its surrounding streets; they look like desert wastes by comparison.

But that’s only the half of it; I also mentioned a menagerie. I remember as a ten year old conducting an audit of wildlife at our place. Twenty-two budgies, ten pigeons, four bantams, seven sleepy lizards and a big bluetongue, five guinea pigs, two turtles, a rabbit, a cat forever having kittens, a fat old Labrador, another budgie that sat on Mum’s shoulder everywhere she went, a ringtail possum that ate apples in our bedroom each night then tucked itself in with one or other of us at dawn, a bustling fish tank, and in my sister’s wardrobe, a rogue colony of silkworms. Our cousins out on the farm kept us in touch with our larger hairy brothers and sisters too. Mum has never altered her priorities to this day.

So flora and fauna Sunday is something of a homecoming for me. I love the close observation of wildlife that we just heard in Job and the Psalm; I resonate with the way the writers marvel at it all; particularly at the *interconnection* they see so

clearly between wild creatures, flora, Earth, Sun and Moon, light and darkness. You'd think seeing that interconnection is a bit of a no-brainer really. But then you find that a book like *The Secret Life of Trees* comes as an utter revelation to people when its author Peter Wohlleben shows how an entire forest is connected by underground networks of fungus to form a massive, diverse, unified organism so mutually loving that it keeps even ringbarked trees alive.

Last week we began to consider the significance of *connection* as a major theme in the Season of Creation. And you may remember that its opposite, *alienation*, is a working definition of what the church calls sin; alienation from God and from each other. That's why connection with each other, with interconnected wildlife and landscapes is so important. It makes the divine tangible; it connects us with God.

Today, on Flora and Fauna Sunday, the natural world presents us with herself; a miracle of interconnection, symbiosis, co-operation and balance; characteristics which are the deepest hallmarks of the natural order. Nature's interconnection is far more profound than we imagine. By contrast, the competitive, winner-takes-all theories that we have imposed on the natural world have shackled our thinking about nature – as if they explain it entirely. Our theories have blinded us to the centrality of nature's symbiosis. Of course, these theories have a great deal of truth to them; no-one should deny evolution. But they are nothing like complete enough.

Today I wonder if the doctrines of 'natural selection' and the 'survival of the fittest' – the so-called 'cruelty of nature' – have done something more than just skew our understanding of what is natural; done something more than prevent us from seeing the interconnection that sustains everything living. I wonder if our competition doctrines also shape the way we see ourselves; how *we* experience community.

Do native flora and fauna have something to teach us about

community? What is an ecological perspective on society – an ecological spirituality? The key words seem to be relationship, symbiosis, interdependence, harmony – in a word, Nature.

A few of us met to think through the themes and priorities we wanted to cover in this year's Season of Creation. Again and again, we found ourselves talking about the harmony of Indigenous peoples with nature. We are sitting helplessly now watching on as the Indigenous people and creatures of the Amazon rainforests are being burnt out of their homes by farmers, just as happened here over the first 150 years of European colonization; just as continues more subtly today. *Eco-Rant alert.*

I turn again to Bruce Pascoe's remarkable book *Dark Emu*. He cites documents from European explorers and pioneers describing wide-scale Aboriginal agriculture and storages of surplus native grains and yams big enough to support permanent settlements of three or four thousand people between harvests. This was achieved through heavy, co-operative work, but without any need for irrigation, fertilizer or herbicides. Astoundingly, many witnesses have documented a vast, pan-continental 'grain belt' thousands of kilometres north of the Goyder line. (Map on p. 28) Our grazing animals ate it all to the ground and uprooted it virtually upon arrival. Their hooves compacted (and still compact) the Indigenous people's carefully cultivated soil so these native food sources don't grow there any more. And the original people and wild animals – the competition – disappeared behind euphemisms designed to cover up what we Christians don't want to know about ourselves.

We don't live in harmony with nature. We don't spend time in it; we live, work and travel in climate-controlled silos that interact harmfully with nature. Our economically driven priorities won't cherish anything we can't put a money value

on. We're living a lifestyle that destroys anything we don't value. It turns out we don't value Mother Earth. We may as well say it plainly. We're afraid of losing what we have, and so we fight and ignore and vote to protect it – never mind that it costs the Earth. That is true alienation; true sin, and we must repent of that sin.

Christians believe in repentance: it's not grovelling and apologising, but turning from wrong and amending our ways. It's easy to remember as a four step process.

1 Acknowledge wrongs we are doing, wrongs done in our name, and wrongs we benefit from. That's what this sermon is trying to help us do regarding ecology.

2 Renounce those wrongs; stop them. That's clearly imperative.

3 Turn and resolve before God and each other to try to repair the damage we have caused – seeking help from God and each other to do this, and helping others trying to do this. *Students' Global Climate Strike 20 Sept, 12.00 Victoria Square.*

4 Getting on with the repair job, and so returning to a right relationship with our community, in this case the Earth community, and so with God.

We're each at different stages on the way in this process. But what can *we* do? In notice time, Nicola will report on an organisation – the *Foundation for Australia's Most Endangered Species* that we might choose to support as a community.

It's one of many that we could choose from, but on this Flora and Fauna Sunday, it's good to focus on rescuing members of our Earth family from extinction – family members dying out not because they're a danger to us or to anything else, but just because we don't seem to care if we never see them again.

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sin.

I pray that our descendants will be able to know what Jesus is talking about today – what ravens and lilies and grasses are. I pray that our descendants will be consciously connected with all the wonders of life on Earth which reveal *God's eternal power and divine nature* (Rom 1.19) so that they can come to know God.

Amen