

The Season of Creation 3: We are called to Earth care

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SOC 3 – The family of God in our Common Home – Prov 31, Ps 1, Jas 3-4, Mk 9 30-37

A capable wife who can find? What we heard from Proverbs today is the culmination of the book. The environmental scientist and priest, Shaun Cozett writes, [It's a book where] Wisdom is often spoken of in feminine terms. So to speak of Wisdom as a woman or a wife is nothing strange. Here ... Wisdom models the way to look after our home. ... She ensures that everyone and everything can flourish: her family¹⁵, the poor²⁰, the land¹⁶ and the economy.²⁴

I notice too *'she's not afraid for her household'*²¹ and *'she laughs at the time to come'*.²⁵ If only that were true for everyone now.

The Season of Creation is a time when we, the Church, focus on something called incarnational spirituality – the understanding that a physical, flesh-and-blood life can be a true expression of the Spirit of God. We Christians know this most clearly expressed in Jesus, the Word of God, born and living as one of us.

With Jesus as our central focus, we might easily overlook a passage like Proverbs 31 where the Spirit of Wisdom is presented to us incarnated as a woman. Like Jesus, she embodies Wisdom's gracious and life-affirming nature. She too is an expression of incarnational spirituality. The lesson she offers is that every aspect of our physical life is spiritually significant; our choices and actions don't just

affect ourselves and other people; they are important to God, and essential to true flourishing. That's the message of today's Psalm too; we are to be *like trees planted by streams of water, who yield our fruit in due season.*

Our New Testament scripture readings, like the Psalm, present us with the seriousness of choosing otherwise. We get a sense from them of the destructive power of passions, divisions, bitter jealousies, selfish ambition, and competition. James describes as demonic the way these impulses can distort wisdom.

We saw Jesus confronted by these impulses among his followers today. For a second time – even despite the disastrous episode with Peter we saw last week – Jesus tries to teach them about his death and resurrection. Again they don't get it. Their response is to argue among themselves about who is the greatest. So Jesus teaches them that leadership is service, not dominance. ^{Mk 9.36} Then he takes a little child ... in his arms, and says to his disciples, ³⁷ 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.' Yet another chance! That's grace at work for you.

True leadership is shown in care for the most vulnerable, and it is in giving this particular kind of care – where we don't anticipate a repayment or a higher status for ourselves – it is in service and care that we meet God in each other and in ourselves.

In the language that incarnational spirituality might apply to this sort of choice, we'd be exercising *our primal vocation to serve and care for Earth* ^{Gen 2.15}, and *realising our primal identity as Earth-creatures made in God's image and likeness.*

Gen 1.27

That's what the Woman-Wisdom of Proverbs is teaching us; what

the birth and ministry of Jesus is teaching us; that we can embody God's life-giving kindness and service too. The Good News is that God offers us divine wisdom and the rewards of wise living, even while we are still acting unwisely. That's Shaun Cozett's helpful paraphrase of Romans 5.8 – *God proves God's love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.* Here it is again; God offers us divine wisdom and the rewards of wise living, even while we are still acting unwisely.

So we are called to Earth care. Those who are teaching us about the best exercise of this care – scientists who work in meteorology, biology, oceanography and geography, and agencies of the United Nations and NGOs who work with the people and other creatures hardest hit by global heating and habitat destruction – they are all crying out to everyone to do what we can. Wisdom cries out in the marketplace, and thankfully, many people are answering that call.

In this Season of Creation, the world's churches and people of all other faiths are joining together in an unprecedented alliance to heed these calls for concerted action. I've given you a link in my weekly so you can connect with an organisation which is coordinating this multi-faith action. <https://greenfaith.org/faiths4climatejustice/> There is much to be done in a country where the government is wilfully blind and deaf to wisdom's cries for climate justice and the preservation of life, and instead places its faith, and the welfare of our region, in unspecified technology and a wild 'for-ever-after' arms race.

Wisdom's call and our united response could not be more urgent. At deanery this week, as we were talking about these things, our Area Dean, Jenny Wilson shared a powerful statement from Dr Elizabeth Johnson SOSJ which drives home the meaning of inaction; *Extinction is the death of birth itself.*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFZnJ9Q6_Ds

Shaun Cozett asks, *Could Earth be facing what Jesus was trying to teach his apostles in today's gospel: "I will be handed over to people who will kill me..."*? It's the poorest and most vulnerable of Earth's people and the creatures of Earth who have no voice, those who have done nothing to create this crisis, who are the first to bear its horror.

Jesus takes them in his arms and says to us now, 'Whoever welcomes one such little one in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.' Wisdom cries out to be visible, active, engaged – Wisdom must not let herself be gagged. God offers us divine wisdom and the rewards of wise living, even while we are still acting unwisely. I pray that we and people of faith everywhere may follow her lead. Amen