

So I want to start this morning with those words from **Genesis 9:9**.

After the flood God makes a covenant, not just with people but with all of creation. **“I now establish my covenant with you, your descendants and every living creature on earth.** And this is stated 5 times in 7 verses. Scripture makes it clear... **God values everything God has created.** Every living creature matters to God.

And this is what I want to celebrate today. The wisdom of Job. That we **Put Our Ears to the Earth** and pay attention to what the animals, the birds, the fish in the sea can teach us and tell us. What can God’s creatures tell us about God? What can they teach us about ourselves?

And the timing of this is perfect because Kim and I went to visit our daughter Myah in Dunedin from Thursday to yesterday. And we spent all day Friday doing exactly what Job urges us to do. Here’s a couple of very brief videos.

The first clip is from Sandfly Bay and I caught two seals greeting each other. The one seal covered in sand the other fresh out the sea. I just missed him doing a 90-meter surf of the wave all the way to shore. So watch their greeting.

1st VIDEO CLIP

The 2nd clip is when we went to Pukekura to the only mainland breeding colony of Northern Royal Albatross in the world. Took the breath away to see them flying with their 3 meter wingspan.

2nd VIDEO CLIP

The whole experience was deeply moving, and really gave extra power to this wisdom of Job 12:7-9

**“Ask the animals, and they will teach you,
or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you;
8 or speak to the earth, and it will teach you,
or let the fish in the sea inform you.**

9 Because which of all these does not know, that the hand of the Lord has done this?

I remember a few years back, a parishioner told me that when she was a young person in her own Church, she told her pastor how connected to God she felt, how **alive** she felt, when she was among nature and experiencing the beauty of creation.

Instead of rejoicing at this young person’s capacity to experience the presence of God in God’s handiwork, her pastor said... “aahh be careful that’s animism.”

Remembering this story brought to mind my own conversation with one of our young adults around 8 years ago. She was working for Project Jonah, an organisation that helps rescue stranded whales.

As part of our **Care of Creation** sermon series I asked her to preach.

In our preparation discussions she talked very movingly of what it feels like to be alongside these magnificent creatures of the sea in their time of distress. She told me that when she looks in their eyes, she feels the presence of God. Something of the divine staring into her own soul. She recognised a sacred connection between them.

And I said, that’s beautiful, tell the congregation this experience you’ve had. But I sensed a reluctance. When I asked her why, she said words to effect of... **“but will people think it’s ‘proper’ Christianity.”** Basically, she’d also experienced negative comments from other Christians when she voiced these thoughts.

And there are two things that are sad about those two stories.

Firstly, they won’t have been the only people to have had their joy of experiencing the majesty of God’s handiwork quashed by an impoverished biblical understanding.

There's a huge difference between worshipping nature ... and **experiencing God's presence through that which God created and declared very good.**

If (as we are told in Genesis) God is so delighted with the handiwork of His own creation, that He declares it good 6 times over.

And if (as we are also told in Genesis) we are made in the image of our Creator God... then why wouldn't we have the innate capacity to delight in our Makers creation.

Surely, an important part of loving God with all our heart, soul and mind ... is to love and cherish all that God made. And also, to experience the sacred connection (that by definition) must exist between everything God has made.

And secondly, it's the Christian faith that should be at the **forefront** of celebrating God's precious gift. As these two stories show us, this hasn't always been the strongest expression of our faith.

It's why it's important that the Church celebrates this **Season of Creation**. Because it reminds us of our clear biblical calling to cherish the gift of God's good creation.

We are living at a time of deep disconnection. A disconnection and dislocation from God, each other, nature and ourselves. Disconnected from our natural state of being.

As a humanity we have come to see ourselves as somehow separate from nature.

We talk about the 'environment' as if we exist outside of it, instead of recognising that we are completely part of it.

Is it any wonder that we inevitably end up treating nature and our sacred home of planet earth as a commodity and resource to be exploited and used, rather than a sacred gift to be treasured. Isn't this at the root of why we treat the precious gift of God's good creation so poorly. It's the deep wisdom given to us by the Psalmist in Psalm 96.

11 Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound.

12 Let the fields be jubilant and let all the trees of the forest sing for joy. 13 Let all creation rejoice before the LORD. A beautiful expression of the whole of nature rejoicing for the life-giving handiwork of our Creator God.

And St Paul has no doubts that God's first revelation of His own artistic presence... is His own creation. **Romans 1:20**

²⁰ For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.

So how does this wisdom from Job speak to you.

When you PUT YOUR EARS TO THE EARTH ...

- What do the animals teach you?
- What do the birds in the sky tell you?
- How do the creatures of the sea inform you.
- What have God's creatures revealed to you about God?
- What have God's creatures revealed to you about what it means to be human?

Here's a personal story of how the beauty of Creation and God's creatures have shaped and formed me.

2 weeks before I was born, my nan (my moms, mum) got an offer from the council to take up this state house in Acocks Green Birmingham. All their lives Nan, mom and dad had lived in these conditions.

They were called 'back to backs' in inner city Birmingham because lots of families all lived back to back, often with one outside toilet between many families.

In complete contrast, the council house nan had been offered had a back garden the size of this church and more. In the garden was an apple tree, pear tree and oak tree.

But it got better.

At the bottom of the garden, a gate opened out onto a park just a bit smaller than Cornwall Park.

In the park was this pond stocked with all kinds of freshwater fish and a stream running the whole length of the park. There were trees and bushes growing everywhere.

This was the landscape that I was blessed to have as my childhood playground. And I spent my entire childhood, exploring every nook and cranny of this mini piece of God's good creation. I climbed the trees, paddled the stream, ate the fruit and caught the fish.

In summer, I watched in awe as the swifts and swallows dived and darted as we played football and cricket. I looked through the bushes for bird nests and got to know all the various bird species and their migration habits. I sat with school friends making daisy and buttercup chains.

In Autumn we collected conkers and kicked the leaves.

In winter we played in the snow and broke the ice on the stream.

In spring we watched new life burst into bloom everywhere.

All of this... gave me a real appreciation of the changing seasons and how the natural cycle of all things in nature is *dormancy and growth... death and re-birth*. Intrinsic to Creation

AND THERE WERE 2 THINGS I INSTINCTIVELY AND INTUITIVELY KNEW FOR CERTAIN EVEN AS A CHILD.

Firstly, I just **knew** that if I put my ears to the earth and paid attention, then these creatures, the animals, the birds in the sky and the fish ... were teaching and telling me something profound.

That there is a sacred connection between the land, the people and all the living creatures who share it with us. Tangata whenua A sacred oneness to it all. **Everything belongs.**

Secondly, I realised, that I was never more 'alive'... than when I was immersed in this sacred connection. I knew from an early age that nature was speaking to me of something 'beyond' and drawing me into a world of wonder. That nature was charged with the presence of God. Nature and creatures made me feel more 'fully human, fully alive'.

I'd never heard these words of the Psalmist 104:24 **LORD, how manifold are your works. In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.**

But I intuitively KNEW the truth of these words long before I ever read them.

The old school hymn we'd sing in assembly. "*All things bright and beautiful all creatures great and small. All things wise and wonderful the Lord God made them all*". **It made perfect sense to me.**

And it's this truth that I've tried to never lose.

The importance of **Putting our ears to the earth and paying attention.**

Because I truly believe that we are created to live and move and have our very being, immersed in this sacred connection to all living things. It's only by living this way that we can we live with the full sense of **joy and aliveness.**

So this coming week as we celebrate the Season of Creation, **PUT YOUR EARS TO THE EARTH** and delight in the majesty of God's handiwork.

Rejoice in the truth of our sacred connection to nature and all living creatures.

When we open ourselves up to this sacred connection between ourselves and all of God's creatures we are greatly enriched. We ourselves become more human.

Put Your Ear to the Earth and listen to what God's creatures can reveal to you about God? As the Poet Mary Oliver said ... **"pay attention, be astonished."**

What can the animals, the birds in the sky and the creatures of the sea, teach and tell you about God. What can they teach and tell you about yourself? About what it means to be truly human? As we have a time of reflection I'll leave you with these words from HENARE TATE captures it perfectly for me with this...

All life is bound up in the relational nature of the Triune Godhead.

To be in relationship with God is to be simultaneously in relationship with people and creation.

To be in relationship with people is to be in relationship with God and creation.

And to be in relationship with creation is to be in fellowship with God and humanity.