

HOSPITALITY AND CREATION

ST GEORGE'S SERVICES OCTOBER 9 & 10, 2004

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WELCOME

(Title Slide)

Explain what the pictures are about:

- ♦ We are urban dwellers – Canberra is our city, our life, our place within God's Creation
- ♦ But, as I hope to highlight, we're part of a larger, complex interconnected creation where everything has a ripple down & flow on affect (in technical speak this is known as the 'web of life' or 'the upstream-downstream effects'). It's much about context – big picture/little picture stuff.

(Credits Slide)

Today I'll be talking about many aspects of creation – but nothing I say is particularly new! I have drawn widely from others and as you'll see, various faces other than my own will feature! I hope to:

- ♦ raise your awareness of our place within creation
- ♦ suggest some ways you can offer hospitality to creation
- ♦ draw you into a time of worshipful reflection on creation, and
- ♦ encourage you to glorify and honour creation – to celebrate it

On a more personal level, you will also get to come on a bit of a virtual tour of some of the places we Marstons venture to in our 'times out'!

INTRODUCTION

(Slides 1 – 2: some of the 'green' campaign issues of all the parties of the past few weeks of the election)

For Saturday: Well if you haven't voted by now it's too late! Hands up anyone for who today was a voting first – congratulations! And we all get another go next weekend.

or

For Sunday: Insert something appropriate pending outcome of election.

Though perhaps you hadn't thought of it quite like this, more than at any other time in federal politics this election has been about Creation.

We have heard about the need to consider things 'green', of the environment. All parties have hustled on assorted issues from woodchips and oldgrowth forests, water security, energy sources, climate change and toxic waste. At no other time have the 'Greens' looked to pick up so many votes or potentially hold the 'balance of power'.

Many other hot issues of this election revolved in some way around social justice issues. Also to do with Creation.

Regardless of the outcome or of how each of us may be aligned politically, as Christians we are obligated to offer hospitality to creation – to make space in our lives for it.

OUR PLACE WITHIN CREATION

(Slides 3 – 4: passages with pics)

In today's readings we've heard about the creation story and that the Word of God is the foundation of everything.

Creation is a gift.

Creation exists because God speaks.

Creation is itself an act of communication, a form of language. It is an address, an action that expresses an intelligence and asks for intelligent response.

Therefore to respond appropriately to creation is part of responding appropriately to God - and indeed of knowing God.

But just how do we respond?

(Slide 7)

Our track record is not good. In recent times our response has been one of use and abuse. Exploitation rather than exhortation.

Even the church is acknowledging this!

In September 2002, when they met to consider issues prior to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Anglican Congress on the Stewardship of Creation stated: *"Our planetary crisis is environmental, but it is more than that. It is a crisis of the Spirit and the Body, which runs to the core of all that we hold sacred... Greed and over-consumption, which have dictated so much of economic development in the past, must be transformed into generosity and compassion. Transformation is, at its heart, a spiritual matter; it includes every aspect of our lives."*

We need to make space for Creation.

(Slide 8)

We need to develop an intimate relationship with the world in all its variety with God – to relate to God by being 'in tune' with nature, the physical universe of God.

If we understand Creation as a gift from God, as something that makes relationship with God possible, then we can also make Creation a gift back to God – in blessing and thanksgiving and praise – and drop the idea that its just there for our use. Rather we can use creation as a means of sharing generously with others.

In the Genesis story, humanity is called to work with creation to reflect God's character – to perhaps act in a 'priestly' way towards the environment. When we don't bless and give thanks, when we misuse material things, we are damaging our relationship with God and with all Creation.

Again, we need to make space for Creation.

So how can we go about this?

MAKING SPACE FOR CREATION

(Slide 9)

With the way God wants us to make space for Creation, ecology becomes essentially a matter of justice for the human as well as the non-human world. For in that big picture view, ecological harmony means justice for all of creation. (I guess this makes Creation about every-colour-of-the-rainbow issues – not just green ones!)

What do I mean by that big picture view?

(Slide 10)

Earlier I referred to Canberra as being 'our particular creation space' but alluded to a bigger picture – remember, those techo terms: web of life, up & down stream effects.

When making space for Creation we need to add another 'C' into the mix; 'C' for context (there must be something about the letter 'C' for us here at St G's!). For context will show us where we fit in the picture. And Creation needs a REALLY BIG WIDE-ANGLE LENSE but courage to look down the microscope as well! I'll be referring to this idea again as we go along.

Now back to making space. . .

(Slides 11 & 12)

Much of it is in how we think and go about things in our **DAILY** lives by:

- ♦ adopting clean and green practices – walking gently on the earth
- ♦ recycling and reusing resources

- ♦ increasing our knowledge and awareness of issues
- ♦ becoming members and supporters of environment, conservation, aid and welfare organisations
- ♦ giving thanks for our provision and praying for that of others

Every little bit counts – and even your small efforts will make a difference. You could start this week: find out just how much water you use in the loo by counting the flushes (and doing the sums on volume!); get some of those reusable calico shopping bags; take a picnic to the river and soak up a little bit of creation first hand; or try using low energy bulbs in places where lights are on for long periods. OK these are all things at the greener end of that rainbow, but its the way to go!

(Slide 13)

Often making space for Creation can also be a more measured thing. Taking time to just 'BE' with Creation – in a quiet spot by the sea or up a mountain; or conversely even surrounded by the powerful energy nature can throw at us. Given the relationship dimension to Creation, it is hardly surprising that we can find a 'rightness' in these settings – they just 'are' and we can be glad of the experience. It can be at such times that we can have a 'heart to heart' with our Creator, to worship and speak words of praise.

Now I'd like to take you on a bit of a personal journey through Creation. I love the idea of Meister Eckhart that "Every creature is a word of God and a book about God" – I want to read some of that story with you now.

This will be a series of slides showing some the challenges and issues I face as I consider various Creation situations along lines of:

- ♦ (Slide 14 & 15) The 'beautiful picture landscape'. Non indigenous Australians carry the legacy of our European forbears and read the landscape accordingly. It is here that we need to remember that big 'C'! We need to make space for Creation by thinking beyond the pretty picture: clearing, impacts on soils, introduced species, ferals and weeds, loss of biodiversity. We need agriculture but how can we do it sustainably in this ancient land.
- ♦ (Slides 16 & 17) Major Modifications. Clearing and damming particularly but what a beautiful result!
- ♦ (Slides 18 & 19) Water. We are all conscious of this issue at the moment. Water restrictions and uncertainty of supply. Environmental flows and

downstream effects. Water for different uses. In this case making space for Creation means difficult tradeoff decisions!

- ♦ (Slides 20 & 21) Drought. Australia is a land of boom and bust. Drought is a natural part of life. The problem is we have yet to learn how to properly live with it. It's not just about praying for rain. In fact with current severity of the drought I'm almost inclined to pray that it won't! Then at least we might really do something long term about how we respond to this natural phenomena! Don't get me wrong – my heart goes out to all those on the land and in rural communities who are suffering because of this drought. In this case making space for Creation involves compassion and creative solutions often a long way from the source of the problem.
- ♦ (Slides 22 & 23) Playing at the beach. Loving it to death issues. Access. Justice and harmony rather than balance and equity. Ocean issues and climate change. Making space for Creation requires hospitality to our neighbour in global context as well.
- ♦ (Slide 24) Weeds and feral species. God made everything and it was good – in context that is true! You only have to look at rabbits and blackberries to know this. Think about what we do in our gardens. Challenge for urban environments. Making space for Creation is about achieving justice and harmony.

So next time you look on Creation remember that big 'C'. There are certainly many issues to be concerned about but at the same time there is much to praise God for and celebrate.

Be aware. Be active. Get involved. Make some space for Creation.

Just before I wind up, let's do a bit of celebrating. I'm going to read a prayer by Bruce Prewer and show off some of that wonderful Creation (Assorted slides of 'grand' pics):

(Slides 25 – 34)

YOU ARE

You are the Surprise from whom all discoveries grow,
the Delight of whom each victory sings,
the Joy to whom all lasting pleasures flow,
the Search out of whom all science springs,
the Truth who surfaces when all seems lost,
the Love who will not count the cost.

Creating God, high above our understanding,
we worship your mystery!

Redeeming God, deep beyond our deserving,
we worship your mystery!

Inspiring God, near beyond our knowing,
we worship you mystery!

Amen! And we say again Amen!

CONCLUSION

(Slide 35)

Well by now you probably get the idea that I get off on all this creation stuff!

And I hope I've provided you with some inspiration to have a go yourselves.

At this year's Synod, Bishop George commented "The Church of the future, as it was in the past, will be very aware of environmental issues as core values, will celebrate them in its liturgy, advocate for them as justice issues, and be bound by them as matters of personal discipline and awareness." I hope that here at St G's, we too can embrace this view by making space for Creation. Just as for these trees – the sky is the limit.

(Slide 36)