

**Sunday 17 October, 2021**

*A sermon preached by the Revd Canon Christopher Carolane, at St Paul's Cathedral in the second week of the Creation-tide Series.*

**Readings:** Gen 1.1-25; Ps 19; Rev 3.14-22; John 1.1-5

This morning our Old Testament reading, Psalm and Gospel reading all point us to the wonderful truth that God the Father, through God the Son created the heavens and the earth. God's creation was very good and declares for us the **glory** of God.

The ancient Hebrew poet tells us in Genesis 1, that at the culmination of God's creative task, God made human beings to have,

*"... dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." 27 So God created humankind in his image, ... male and female he created them.*" (Gen 1:26-27)

From the very beginning, women and men were made as part of God's beautiful, good creation, and were given **dominion** over it.

"Dominion" is an interesting word. The Hebrew word that is translated "dominion" is 'radah (raw-daw). It has several meanings that seem somewhat negative like "to tread down", "to prevail against" but it can also mean "to rule over" and I think it is in this sense that it is meant here. Humans were given the role of "rulers" over creation.

Rulers may be good or bad. Surely in this context humanity was given the task of ruling wisely over God's beautiful and good creation. During this "Creation-tide", we do well to assess how we are doing in ruling over creation in 2021.

Last week the Dean drew our attention to the groanings that creation is making because of Global warming. He challenged us concerning the need of repentance - *metanoia* – *repentance from* wrong attitudes and practices concerning the misuse and/or overuse of fossil fuels which result in increasing greenhouse gases in our atmosphere. There *is* a need to change and to actively embrace renewable energy resources that do not pollute our environment. There is a need for a 180 degree "about face" so that the situation might be reversed, and the consequences of ongoing global warming and climate change might be diminished.

This morning I want to draw your attention to another aspect of humanity's "dominion" over creation. This relates to the inequity of sharing of the earth's **food resources**.

Genesis 1:29-30 state: <sup>29</sup> *God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ... , I have given every green plant for food."*

Later in the Genesis prehistory poems, after the flood, we read these words:

*God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. ... <sup>3</sup> Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. (Gen 9:1-3)*

There is a lot more that could be said about food, but sufficient to say the principle is laid down that God has given both animals and plants to humanity for food. As rulers of creation, it behoves us to use these provisions wisely.

So, how are we going in this respect?

A recent United Nation's Hunger Report affirmed that there is sufficient food produced in the world to feed every person on the globe. However, as many as 811 million people still go hungry. After steadily decreasing for a decade, world hunger is on the rise, affecting almost 10% of the world's population.

Even in Australia, there are still significant numbers of people who live in poverty – especially amongst our indigenous people where over 120,000 indigenous people are living below the poverty line.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear, as a global society we are NOT sharing the resources of the earth with equity. We are not even sharing our own resources here in Australia equitably.

The Australian Government's Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment reported recently as follows<sup>2</sup>:

*Food waste, ..., has significant economic and environmental impacts:*

- *One third of the world's food is wasted.*
- *25% of water used in agriculture is used to grow food that is ultimately wasted*
- *Food waste produces eight per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. If food waste was a country, it would be the third largest greenhouse gas emitter, behind the USA and China.*

*Food waste is also a major problem in Australia.*

*The [National Food Waste Strategy Feasibility Study \(link is external\)](#) reported that (in Australia):*

- *Food waste costs the economy around \$36.6 billion each year.*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.actionagainsthunger.org/world-hunger-facts-statistics> accessed 15 October 2021

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.environment.gov.au/protection/waste/food-waste> accessed 15 October 2021

- *Each year we waste around 7.6 million tonnes of food across the supply and consumption chain – this wastage equals about 312kg per person, equivalent to around one in five bags of groceries or \$2,000 to \$2,500 per household per year.*
- *Food waste accounts for approximately 3% of Australia’s annual greenhouse gas emissions.*
- *Australia uses around 2600 gigalitres of water to grow food that is wasted – this equates to the volume of water in five Sydney Harbours.*
- *The amount of land used to grow wasted food covers more than 25 million hectares, a landmass larger than the state of Victoria.*

How are we going as rulers over these aspects of God’s creation? Clearly – not well! These ugly statistics are not going to change unless **we** change. We need to repent!

Why don’t we change?

I am sure there is more than one answer to this rhetorical question. But I want to suggest that one reason is complacency – especially for those of us who have plenty to eat.

Let us look quickly at our reading today from Revelation 3. It is the letter from the Risen Christ to the Christians in the church of Laodicea. These Christians were smug in their self-sufficiency. Christ says to them: <sup>17</sup> ... you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.’ You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. (Rev. 3:17). Just prior to this Jesus said: “I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. (Rev. 3:15 – 16)

These *Christian* people were neither hot nor cold in their passion for Jesus. They were just lukewarm, so much so that Jesus said he was about to vomit them out of his mouth.

As I read this letter again, it made me think of the complacency so many of us have about the care of God’s creation and the rightful sharing of its bounty. It is so easy to sit back and think “I’m all right Jack!” “I have plenty to eat. I don’t go to bed hungry. Water? There is plenty! So much so that I can use wholesome clean and life-giving water to flush my toilet.” We hear about global warming and climate change, we hear about poverty and world hunger, but so often I fear we hear without listening. The words have no effect on us. We remain lukewarm in our attitude to how God is calling us to respond – how God calls us to care for the planet.

Prior to becoming a teacher, prior to studying theology and training for ordained ministry, I studied science, majoring in Chemistry. My scientific studies put me in awe of God the creator and of God’s bountiful and beautiful creation. It also taught me enough to know that the solutions to the problems of global warming, climate change, food wastage and world poverty are not simple. My studies also taught me that change – true repentance in turning away from that which is wrong is not easy, and like all repentance it comes with risk. But my brothers and sisters, just because the

solutions are not simple is NOT a reason for ignoring the need for them. To ignore them is to be smug and complacent. To ignore them is to remain lukewarm.

But look at Jesus' wonderful invitation in Revelation 3.20. Jesus says to the lukewarm Christians who need to be saved from their complacency, "Listen! I am standing at the door knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come into you and eat with you and you with me. To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne."

I believe that the scientific solution to the right dominion of the earth is bound up in the theological solution of living in union with Christ. When Christ is invited in as host of our lives, we can have the courage for change. We can be given the strength to repent and as we will consider in a few weeks' time, we will have the benefit of God's wisdom as we seek to right the wrongs that we have done and continue to do.

Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.