

Year A Creation 1 6th September 2026

Genesis 1:1-2:3. Acts 17: 22a & 24-28. John 1: 1-5.

Today we celebrate for the first time the Feast of Creation in Christ. Yes, it is a bit of a mouthful. And also for the first time, we have been offered a specific set of readings that relate to the theme of creation, to replace the normal readings for this first week in the liturgical year. So at least this week, I do not have to be so very creative to make the theme of creation fit into the revised common lectionary readings. But, that is as far as the adaptations and revisions go – for the next four weeks we revert back to the revised common lectionary readings!

The theme of Creationtide this year is ‘Living Water’, inspired by Ezekiel 47 verses 9 and 12.

⁹ Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish once these waters reach there. It will become fresh, and everything will live where the river goes. ¹² On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing.”

Next week Sue will be using this text for her reflection.

Luckily, in our readings today, well at least the Genesis reading, it does explicitly mention water! So today I will focus on the Genesis reading.

Firstly, let us be clear that just because this creation story is the first in the collection of 66 books that go to make up the Bible, it doesn’t mean it is the oldest story in the Bible. In fact, it is a story gathered during the Babylonian exile, and brought into the Hebrew tradition on the return from exile in 538 BC. So there are many older fragments of stories and songs in Hebrew Scripture, some dating back to 900 or perhaps as far back at 1,100 BC.

Secondly, in translating the Bible, choices are made as to how to treat periods of time, and to represent them. We are all very accustomed to hearing the

refrain, 'and there was evening and there was morning, the first day', and so on for each of the days of creation. In Hebrew the word used for day can also mean an era, an aeon, a lengthy period of time beyond human comprehension. Our Creator God works on a vastly different time scale to us. So a 'day' for God, really doesn't mean 24 hours, or one rotation of the earth.

With that understanding, we can then look at the progression of the development of the earth as described in Genesis 1. The earth was formed about 4.54 billion years ago, out of the chaos of the expansion of energy and matter. But Earth was formed about 9 billion years after the big bang. Our planet was formed by matter coalescing as a result of gravity and the accretion of materials from meteors and other larger masses of materials, including water. Water was formed between 100 and 200 million years after the big bang. Hydrogen, formed in the instant of the big bang, combined with oxygen that was formed inside the first exploding stars, to make water. Water, in massive ice formations crashed into Earth, as part of the chaos of the first stages of creation of our planet. I find it hard to imagine the amount of water, in frozen form, there must have been flying around our universe, that came to earth to form our oceans.

On the second 'day' or age of creation the atmosphere was formed. Scientists inform us that we have had three different atmospheres, over time. The first was about 4.6 million years ago, of helium and hydrogen. That lasted no time at all, well actually about 100 million years! The second was formed about 4.4 million years ago. Volcanoes released many gases and water vapour, creating a heavier and more permanent atmosphere. And finally, simple microbes called cyanobacteria evolved and used photosynthesis to turn carbon dioxide into oxygen. Free oxygen built up significantly during the Great Oxidation Event around 2.3 billion years ago, creating today's oxygen-and-nitrogen-rich air. So, the second day of creation played out over roughly 2.3 million years.

On the third day plant life developed. About 500 million years ago the first mosses appeared. About 420 million years ago the first plants able to transport water up inside their structures developed. 370 million years ago the first plants forming wood appeared, enabling taller plants to grow, and there is evidence of plants producing seed for the first time shortly after that. So plants

developed from the most basic to more developed plants issuing seeds over a period of at least 130 million years.

The fourth day is a tricky one. Lights formed in the sky to differentiate night from day, in the dome of the sky, seasons developed and the stars became visible. The moon was formed roughly 4.5 billion years ago, about 50 to 60 million years after the solar system as we know it stabilised and formed. The earth was impacted by a massive Mars-sized planet called Thea, about 4.5 billion years ago, which produced the tilt on its axis, which would have started the process of seasons, as the earth settled into an orbit around the Sun.

The fifth day is when the first animals are described as swarming in, and emerging from, the sea. And the sixth day is when all kinds of animals evolved. Fish first developed about 550 million years ago, and the diversity and number of fish really grew about 350 million years ago. About 530 million years ago, animal forms that lived on the earth rapidly evolved and developed. And of course, have continued to develop and evolve, particularly after mass extinction events on earth. So this fifth day probably covers a period of at least 200 million years.

And finally we come to the sixth day. Homo genus made an appearance about 2.8 million years ago, but Homo Sapiens only emerged from Africa about 300,000 years ago, or 0.3 million years.

And after this 4.5 billion year creation, which is described as being 'six days' God saw that the creation and said that 'it was **very** good'. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

And here we are, homo sapiens, with the power to cause so much damage, or should I say, continue to cause so much damage to our planet; our home, that took 4.4 billion years to achieve this beautiful and unique point of creation.

When you reflect and sit in silence with the story of creation, described in these six ages or days, does it not humble you? Does it not make you wonder and fill you with awe? As a spiritual discipline, I ask you to take the time to ponder anew the story of creation, to notice the natural world all around you, and give thanks for our world. In our every day lives we can forget about the beauty and sacredness of the Earth. And I hope, that as you stop and look

around you, as you see the changing colours on the Pentland Hills as purple becomes so dominant, you will be motivated with a strong desire to be a good steward of this land.

The theme of living water is so relevant this week. We have seen the destructive power of water and debris killing so many people in Nepal; almost certainly due to global warming melting glaciers that have never before melted so much. That was not living water, but destructive killing water, water made so by humankind's desecration of God's work of creation.

Other water is now so polluted because of land contamination, because of run off from fields full of synthetic fertiliser, from farm slurry, from run off from roads, and from untreated sewage, that for many people 'living water' does not mean water-giving life. Also, poor water quality impacts on wildlife so badly. It is too narrow to solely focus our concerns on humans.

So as we commence this season of creationtide, I commend to you the spiritual practice of noticing, of appreciating, and giving thanks for all of God's creation which surrounds you. Our gospel reading is a timely reminder that the Spirit of God is in everything. God permeates everything, every single part of the Earth, every single part of the Universe, and yet God extends beyond it in time and space, too.

During this coming week, and maybe as a spiritual discipline for this season, how might you become more aware of God's creation, be able to connect with it and be joyful in it, to value it, and commit to protecting it?

You may have seen in the news that Wendell Berry, a great poet and novelist died this last week. One of his poems speaks so eloquently about some of what I have tried to convey this morning. Perhaps I should not have preached at this length and just read out the poem and left ten minutes of silence?

The Peace of Wild Things, Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.