

Reflection – St.Margaret’s Unting Church, Mooroolbark

Sunday 18th February, 2018

GOD REMEMBERS, REMINDS GODSELF AND STAYS IN RELATIONSHIP -
GOD LOVES US

- *Rev Deacon Jenny Preston*

The writers of Genesis who made this religious text for themselves who were a peculiar group of people – they were a small third rate vassal state subject to all the other major players in their region – and they tried to differentiate themselves in writing this holy text – they drew on familiar ancient stories of cataclysmic stories from many parts of Mesopotamia – Israel itself didn’t have a flood story.

They re-tell their understanding of creation in figurative language, full of theology and rhetoric ways – they were ordinary ancients interpreting their God’s hatred of sin and love of creation. The image of hanging the bow in the sky comes from their Canaanite neighbours, since in their mythology, the God of Baal hangs his war bow in the clouds after the earth’s creation

They understood God as a God of both power and justice – The One who created all things also stood as judge over all things and is entitled to destroy all things when they prove disappointing.

God actually GAVE an unheard of surrendering of divine power – bringing a new dimension into the ancients’ understanding of God as inherently self-giving, willing to enter into a relationship that puts limits even on God’s prerogatives.

Tradition credits Moses as the [author of Genesis](#), but modern scholars increasingly see them as a product of the 6th and 5th centuries BC.[[]

Covenants in near east were legal document For example – a conquering kingdom might covenant not to destroy a losing kingdom, as long as the losers promised to fight against the conqueror’s enemies and to support the conqueror with troops and supplies.

This covenant is talked about in parallel with ancient Near East treaty forms emphasising the imbalance of power between the two signatories. --- what does each get out of the covenant and which side will offer unending fidelity.

The BIG NEWS is that God did not turn away as conqueror. God feels love, mixed with a bit of regret, and makes a covenantal promise;

Frederick Buechner puts the Covenantal promise like this:

"Never again, God had said, and Noah clung on to those words like a raft in a high sea. With the rainbow tied around his little finger to jog his memory, surely God would never forget what he'd said. No matter what new meanness men might think up, surely the terrible thing would never happen again.

This is a covenant of reconciliation and peace, a universal one with all peoples and with nature itself, all living creatures. There are three parts to this Covenant

It's a one-sided covenant – God offers it without strings

Secondly, the symbol and sign is the rainbow – which was a war bow but for the Hebrews, the hanging up of the war bow is more – it's a sign of the end of God's reaction of rage against human sin.

The third thing is – the rainbow is not for us to see – although it helps us to remember God loves us. But, like Buechner says, it's for God to remember, to recall his love and compassion because God is madly in love with all God has made and will strive with every divine nerve to make a way for all creatures to thrive in the cosmos.

Our response is to keep loving God and God's Creation. For this is our quintessential passage for a full and rich environmental theology: God loves the cosmos and works for its ongoing success and bids all those who loves God to love the cosmos too, and to join God in that good environmental work.

It includes a blessing, too, a renewal of the blessing GOD SAW ALL HE HAD MADE, AND IT WAS GOOD. The Covenant with Noah is the culmination of the violence and chaos which befell the earth – with Cain & Abel and their lot. We could call today's first Lenten reading an eco-covenant which points to Easter Day of Easter Day and its whole new story of promise.

It's also a story of power and the checking of power. We are aware, aren't we, of the harm that we are all making to our planet, and it's God's wisdom given to us, which must be applied for reconciliation and peace

This chapter is political theology – All flesh - All the earth – at least six different times in 10 verses - so it's unmistakable that there is no living thing anywhere that will ever exist anywhere that is not covered under

the scope of this covenant - which is extraordinary because it's in a book which talks about how important this little people of this little vassal state is to their God.

"This is a Partnership with all flesh" says God, and our ancestors in faith give us this colourful arc to remind God to be patient when God's human partners persist in being less than generous & hospitable towards their own kind much less toward all flesh.

The rainbow symbolizes not only peace but hope, --- we must live and act in expectation that things will get better, not only getting us through the difficult times but also giving us strength to work proactively in the interest of a just and peaceful world.

As we go on we see how the prophets continue to remind Israel of their responsibility to care for the earth – the soil, the minerals, everything

And where some would see Genesis 1:26-28, as saying that human beings have more value than the rest of Creation, -- with a comprehensive and open reading of this Primeval history, we understand humankind to have a responsibility to care for the earth and all living things in the way that God would wish.

Leviticus 25 reveals a God who wants the land to be looked after and for all people to have access to the earth's resources. *Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, "When you come into the land which I give you, then the land shall keep a sabbath to the LORD. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in its fruit; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to the LORD.*

We can choose a Lenten fast that focusses on ending injustices done to the earth and its peoples, by choosing a fast that results in replenishing the earth – so that we inhabit the vision imagined in Isaiah 58 – "and you will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters never fail v. 11"

God's inclusivity in this ancient covenant is radical and all-encompassing – and we live in an ancient country which needs all the radical love we can afford it.

In this work of REGENERATION, all our care of earth and all living creatures must reflect the love, mercy, compassion and justice of God (not the law of the jungle where each species depends on eating the other)

What vision can we hold out to the community around us –

I'm pretty sure most of you signed the protest about the Adani Mine; I know that you are early forerunners of ecological creation-centred environmental care by putting in solar panels, and a tank here, that you collect coffee grounds for mulching, you re-cycle even small cosmetic/shampoo containers, and you've probably explored the ten things that our JUSTACT work of Cath James has produced. My older daughter's family do the Regeneration stuff – they ride to their church, they are eating less meat, and more pulses.

In this current Federal Government turmoil it appears that the selfishness of various big land-owners with large water-rights on the Murray-Darling Basin have the ear of politicians and this vital matter of water rights is being down-played in the Federal-State stalemate.

Some of you are probably more abreast the latest figures on efforts to decrease the effects of global warming; I have found it's difficult to get a definitive statement from government websites. And I've found the Australia Religious Response to Climate Change has some of the best information – it is so multi-faith oriented.

So, in summary – this first covenant has no strings attached

Secondly, the sign of the Covenant – the rainbow – is beautifully and richly symbolic of God's love, God's hope for all flesh.

Thirdly – it is not really for us to see, but for God to remember on his little finger.

God loves the cosmos and works for its ongoing success and bids all who love God to love the cosmos, too and join. Amen.