



Sunday 1st September 2024
 Season of Creation
 The Rev'd Canon Jenny Wilson

In the name of God, creating, redeeming, sanctifying, ... Amen.

*I wandered lonely as a cloud
 That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
 When all at once I saw a crowd,
 A host, of golden daffodils;
 Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
 Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.*

*Continuous as the stars that shine
 And twinkle on the milky way,
 They stretched in never-ending line
 Along the margin of a bay:
 Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
 Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.*

*The waves beside them danced; but they
 Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
 A poet could not but be gay,
 In such a jocund company:
 I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
 What wealth the show to me had brought:*

For oft, when on my couch I lie
 In vacant or in pensive mood,
 They flash upon that inward eye
 Which is the bliss of solitude;
 And then my heart with pleasure fills,
 And dances with the daffodils.¹

What wealth the show to our poet had brought, the show of daffodils that spring day, when William Wordsworth had wandered in the Lake District near his home.

Is it daffodils for us, those spring flowers native to England and now to so many of our Australian gardens? Or is it our native wildflowers? Those flowers that return year by year in our spring, almost as friends revisiting us, pea flowers and grevillea, wattle and perhaps my favourites the little blue squill, an example of the many lilies that are found in the Australian bush in Spring. Are they for us the “wealth” that Wordsworth speaks of, the gift, those flowers that dance in the breeze and fill our hearts with pleasure when in our quiet moments, on our couches, we remember them.

Jesus certainly knew the wealth, to use Wordsworth’s word, that God’s creation is – as Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si’* – “On Care for our Common Home” put it - “With moving tenderness [Jesus] would remind them that each one of them is important in God’s eyes: “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. ... The Lord was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because he himself was in constant touch with nature, lending it attention full of fondness and wonder.”²

Knowing creation through flowers, or landscapes, in one particular “thin place” - as the Celtic writers described those places where the finite and the infinite are so close that we could almost touch heaven - or in many places. Where is it for us? Our garden, or a beach, or somewhere in the bush, is it here near where we live? Or is the place we know Wordsworth’s “wealth” in another place, a home away from here perhaps, a home we left willingly or perhaps not at all willingly, because it was not safe anymore. We remembered Refugee Sunday last Sunday at Evensong, where for so many, home is not safe, anymore. Where, in

¹ William Wordsworth

² Pope Francis *Laudato Si’* 96, 97

the world, do we love the world, do we know creation is our home, and we sense the gratitude we might offer God for it and we might sense our God-given work to care for it. What place or flower or tree or landscape reminds us that “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it” as the psalmist writes, and that God grieves the earth’s struggle to be well.

For the earth is not well. The earth is not well, at all.

The theologian David Tacey says that:

The environmental crisis is the result of our inability to love fully and without reservation. It is our failure to love the world as part of our selves and as God’s creation. . . . Ultimately, we have misnamed it as an environmental crisis, because it is rather a crisis of human consciousness; it is our fault, not the fault of the environment. . . .

Something like love or fellow-feeling is absent from our relations with the world. We have confined our love to human persons dear to us, family, friends, partners and children. Or we confine love to our ideas, religions, ideologies, and systems of meaning. Our love seems to dwindle and finally stop or disappear when we reach beyond the human to the world.

*We have to learn to fall in love with the world. We have to care for the world as if it were ourselves. The writer Alice Walker put it well: *Anything We Love, Can Be Saved*. This is a source of hope amid the gloom about the state of the world. If our love can be expanded, the rest looks after itself.*³

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So it’s a lovely thing, I think, that this morning’s Old Testament reading is taken from the Song of Songs. That song about love.

*The voice of my beloved!
 Look, he comes,
 leaping upon the mountains,
 bounding over the hills.
 My beloved is like a gazelle
 or a young stag.
 Look, there he stands
 behind our wall,
 gazing in at the windows,
 looking through the lattice.
 My beloved speaks and says to me:*

³ David Tacey “Environmental spirituality” in *Engage (The Australian Centre for Spirituality)* August 2024 Issue 16, p. 12.

*'Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away;
for now the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of singing has come,
and the voice of the turtle-dove
is heard in our land. (Song of Songs 2: 8-12)*

This love song set in spring, set in the midst of flowers and mountains and the song of birds, seems to be portraying the words of two human lovers although it is often interpreted as being about God's love for humanity.

Jewish tradition reads it as an allegory of the relationship between God and Israel. In modern Judaism, certain verses from the Song are read on the Eve of the Sabbath or at Passover which marks the beginning of the grain harvest as well as commemorating the Exodus from Egypt, to symbolize the love between the Jewish people and their God.

In the Christian tradition the Song of Songs has been interpreted as a depiction of the love between Christ and his Church, reading the Songs as a theological metaphor produces an interesting view of this relationship one in which the two partners are equals, bound in a committed relationship.

How shall we ponder this song about love as we enter the Season of Creation, as we embark on a piece of time when we consciously allow our concern for the earth, God's deep love and longing for the health of the earth, to be our focus?

I was fortunate in my own studies to be influenced at Theological College by the writing of The Earth Bible Project – written by a group of Biblical scholars, based in Adelaide. The writings of this group followed from the idea that the earth is a character in the scriptural texts. The earth has a voice in scripture. The earth might speak in love or cry out in pain. The earth's relationship with God is profound and beautiful. Might we read, then, this passage from the Song of Songs as a love song sung by God to the creation, or to the earth? Could we imagine the earth saying to God or God saying to the earth:

*'Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away;
for now the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of singing has come,*

*and the voice of the turtle-dove
is heard in our land.*

It is surely not too difficult to imagine God naming the earth, with the most profound love, “my fair one”. My fair one, which is now in such pain.

David Tacey said, remember, *The environmental crisis is the result of our inability to love fully and without reservation. It is our failure to love the world as part of our selves and as God’s creation.*

There is no doubt that God loves the earth, that God loves God’s whole creation. How might we love the world as part of ourselves? How might we learn to fall in love with the world? We have to care for the world as if it were ourselves. *Anything We Love, Can Be Saved*, the writer Alice Walker put it.

Each year in September, as in so many churches across the world, we celebrate the Season of Creation. We devote this time to learning to love the world as part of ourselves.

Our spiritual guides this September will be artists – those who arrange flowers and John Hamilton who paints. The Flower Guild of St Peter’s Cathedral led by Julie Doherty and Elspeth Harley, and ably supported by John and Rosie Hamilton, have designed a calendar for next year, showcasing the beauty of flower arrangements in the Cathedral through the seasons. John has painted a series of paintings to accompany the calendar. And 25% of the funds raised through the sale of the paintings will be given to an Anglicare Green Thumbs project encouraging young adults to find nurture and peace through the creation of a garden.

And we? We might sit and pray in a garden, or watch the flower arrangers and John show us how they arrange and paint flowers, or stand on God’s dear earth and hear God name that earth “my fair one” and hope that the healing of the planet will be determinedly brought about by courage and sacrifice and love. For mightn’t it be true? Could it possibly be true? That anything we love can be saved.