

Proverbs 8. 1-8, 22-32

James 2. 14-17

Mark 7. 24-37

We are all familiar with the poetic beauty of the language which begins the Gospel of John: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.* It is language which invites us to imagine the world and the eternal presence of the one who is the Word, there from the beginning with God. The truth is that the prologue to John is an echo of the much earlier writings of what we have read from the Book of Proverbs: *The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.* Both of these texts stand in the Hebrew wisdom tradition. They are deeply poetic and invite us to imagine a world infused with the very life of God.

While this wisdom tradition is part of our own Christian heritage most of us were raised with another image of God; God located somewhere on a cloud in another realm, one to which we would pass after this life. And with this God out there vision of God, when it came to imagining Creation, it was as though God had set a clock going, wound it up and walked away. Creation was disenchanted, stripped of meaning and wonder. We are reaping the consequence of this disenchantment in our own time.

The Church is concerned with questions of ultimate meaning and as people of faith we plumb our scriptures to wonder together with our ancestors about the big questions. It is human to wonder about these things, especially as we recognise our own mortality. One of these questions is: where did we come from, how did all that we inhabit come into being? The Book of Proverbs affirms that the Creation is infused with the wisdom of God – and it imagines Wisdom as a helper, there by God's side.

We live in the consumer age – maybe this is coming to an end because we are coming to recognise how our voracious consumption is ravaging the earth. Our trouble is that we were raised to understand ourselves as consumers, that getting ahead and consuming was the meaning of our lives. Generation after generation has been inducted into this self-understanding. The earth is saying stop!

But, how do we stop or change course? How do we find another source of meaning for ourselves? How do we model a way of being for our children and grandchildren which is counter to the meaning-stripped world they have been inducted into? And how do we talk with others about the changes that need to take place?

My understanding is that we need to reconnect with the natural world in ways that give meaning to *our* being in the world. This is not easy or straightforward when we live in a big city of five million people. The sunrise and the sunset, the night sky, the immensity of the Australian horizon, the coming and going of the seasons are not readily available to us, as they are in the country. Nevertheless, we can reconnect with the small elements of the natural world that are around us. Flowers, plants, birds, the wind, the sun, the bursting forth of Spring that we are in the midst of now.

During the Season of Creation, I am inviting us to undertake a daily contemplation of the world immediately around us and seek the presence of the Creator in what we see and touch and sense. This contemplation is called an Examen and is in the pattern of a process of inner reflection developed by St Ignatius. Ignatius was the founder of the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, and Jesuits have practiced this pattern of the Examen for five centuries. We can be sure of its effectiveness. In this contemplation I pray the world we experience with our senses will enter into us; that we will be changed. Maybe this will bring us joy. Maybe the brokenness of what we see will cause us sadness. Out of our joy our souls becoming bigger. And out of our sadness we can consider what needs changing, what we need to turn away from, how we need to act differently.

Pope Francis, in his 2015 Encyclical *Laudato Si* writes:

*If we approach nature and the environment without openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.*

A copy of the Examen was sent out with the worship resources on Friday. I trust that by undertaking the Examen during the Season of Creation, our way of being in the world will be transformed and that a new way of being will well up in us, changing the way we live, the choices we make and impacting on those with whom we share our lives. The wisdom of God will inveigle her way into our being and we will become wise in her way. May it be so.

Andrew Boyle