

Westgate Baptist Community
Lent 4 21 March 2004
"Creation Reconciled"
A sermon by Geoff Wraight

What's Lent got to do with The Ecological Crisis?

Purpose: To introduce the theme of Renewing Creation. To see the link between Creation and Redemption in Christ as a central part of our faith. To see the connection between and participation in the renewal of humanity and the environment is part of our reflective journey to the cross.

March 7 – Outdoor Service: Creation Groaning

March 14 – Creation Birthing – reflection on Gen 1 as a story of birth – creation theology.

March 21 – Creation Reconciled – reflection on the invitation to be reconnected with the environment and to see that resurrection is a symbol and reason for hope for the earth.

March 28 – Creation Renewed – the vision of a new reality – happening already

Introduction and Re-visiting of where we began.

There has been a spate of global disaster films in the last few years that either speculate or exaggerate some natural phenomena like an asteroid hitting the earth (Deep Impact and Armageddon), or from aliens attacking like Independence Day. They have been spectacularly successful and the special effects amazing especially in the scenes where the city of New York gets destroyed by a giant tidal wave or massive flying saucer.

May 28 will see the worldwide release of The Day After Tomorrow, the eco-armageddon story to beat all others.

The first trailers for the film, released on the internet last week, give a taste of the scale of the eco-horrors to come. Filmed in a combination of slick computer generated special effects and simulated live news broadcasts, tidal waves sweep across cities and snow piles halfway up the towers of Manhattan as disjointed voices articulate the chaos around them.

"What you are seeing is happening now," says a breathless newsreader. "Look over behind me," shouts a TV reporter, "that's a tornado, yes, a twister." The film cuts to a tornado erupting next to the Hollywood sign in Los Angeles. A huge flock of birds flies across the sky, 100 m tides wash in and drown the entire city of New York.

Filmed with a budget of more than \$100m and special effects said to be the greatest thing since, well, since the last big budget movie, the film has one other difference from other Hollywood blockbusters: it actually based on a real scientific theory. (as Gavin Mountjoy pointed out to me last week)

Global warming is now a well accepted theory and recent weather history – especially in the rate of melting of the polar ice caps and glaciers around the world.

The Pentagon released study last month that suggested that one outcome of global warming could be the rise of mass civil unrest. In one scenario, drought, famine and rioting erupt across the world, spurred on by climate change. As countries face dwindling food supplies and scarce natural resources, conflict becomes the norm.

The Day After Tomorrow's advance publicity suggests a typical Hollywood mix of fact, fantasy and hype: fake weather reports and testimonies from fans about where they would like to be the day the world dies are mixed with earnest exhortations to help avert global warming.

In fact, Europe and the Pentagon are taking a new look at the greatest danger such climate change could produce for the northern hemisphere - a sudden shift into a new ice age. What they're finding is not at all comforting.

In quick summary, if enough cold, fresh water coming from the melting polar ice caps and the melting glaciers of Greenland flows into the northern Atlantic, it will shut down the Gulf Stream, which keeps Europe and northeastern North America warm. The worst-case scenario would be a full-blown return of the last ice age - in a period as short as 2 to 3 years from its onset - and the mid-case scenario would be a period like the "little ice age" of a few centuries ago (1400) that disrupted worldwide weather patterns leading to extremely harsh winters, droughts, worldwide desertification, crop failures, and wars around the world.

The fact is that the world's leaders are slowly but finally coming awake to the fact that climate change and unchecked exploitation of the planet is going to affect the future of all human life and even within our own lifetime..

The interconnectedness of all the creation as we saw last week is not just a discover of recent science and impending disasters. It is there in the Biblical view of creation where God the Creator is in an intimate and interdependent relationship with the earth.

We see this in the Creation narrative of Genesis 1 when the images of the birthing of Creation at the very beginning and the process of birthing can be seen in this text and its poetic description of the six days of creation.

We saw that this world view of how God is related to the world is very different to the dualistic and mechanistic world view that has been behind much of the western religious and political mindset for centuries..

(Show OHP 1 from last week)

In Romans 8, Paul speaks of the whole creation groaning as humanity is in anticipation of adoption and reconciliation. (Actually there are three ‘groanings’ in this passage. First, creation groans in labour pains then humankind inwardly as it awaits adoption – and finally the Spirit communicates with God in unutterable groanings too deep for words.) There is a lovely quote from Michael Leunig where describes the human groan as “the cello of the soul.”

All around us the Creation is groaning and waiting for renewal. We have noted several Australian examples of environmental destruction and hope over the last few weeks.

In addition to the destruction of old growth forests the animals too are suffering.

Australian mammals have been disappearing before our eye. The existence of small mammals across our land has almost become a thing of the past. No longer are there colonies of brush-tailed bettong, brush –tailed possum, bilby, stick-nest rat, mainland tammar wallaby or quolls , to name a few. The World Wildlife Fund, now estimates that one in five Australian mammals are likely to become extinct and the one third of all the worlds now extinct mammals are Australian.

Land clearing and broadacre farming practices have destroyed the habitat of these species. But small tracts of bushland, woodland and grassland remain and within those areas some bird and animal species still struggle to survive.

The creation is hurting and the creator is hurting as a parent hurts for its estranged child.

In the Biblical model of Creation we saw that God the Creator is in relationship with the Creation as a parent to child – different and other yet bound by a relationship of love.

In Christ, God was reconciling the world to Godself we read – and the theme we are reflecting on today is that in this reconciliation that we celebrate at Easter time in the story of Jesus the creation and its pain are also included in this invitation and hope for reconciliation.

Which brings us to the parable of the Loving Parent read to us earlier.

Lets here this parable in different paraphrase that may help us see the connection...

(read page 37-38 of Renewing Creation)

There is reason to hope. Reconciliation and the work of reconciliation has profound implications for all of the earth. But it has to start and home – it has to start with us. We can be participators and responders to the hope of reconciliation in the world to the work of the spirit of God and the good news about Jesus.

Suddenly, this little faith community here at Westgate is seen to be part of something much bigger and indeed world changing.

Two contrasted pieces of news this week took me from despair to hope..

John Pilgers devastating piece yesterday..

The invasion of Iraq, which began one year ago this week, was "organised with lies", says the new Spanish Prime Minister. Does anyone doubt this any more?

And yet these proven lies are still dominant in Australia. Day after day, their perpetrators seek to obfuscate and justify an unprovoked, illegal attack that has now killed up to 55,000 people, including at least 10,000 innocent civilians; that every month causes the death and injury of 1000 children from exploding cluster bombs; Not to mention the 600 young American soldiers who had died in the last 12 months.

2700 WTC, 202 Bali Bombings, 201 Madrid. Total = 3,100 people

So saturated are we in the West in the devilry of Third World tyrants (most of them the products of Western imperialism) that we have lost all sense of the enormous crime committed in our name.

It is indeed a good thing that the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein is over. But that worthy goal should and could have been accomplished, over time, in much better ways than a pre-emptive and largely unilateral war that has proven to be both unnecessary and unjust. Iraq is now a big mess with no clear or responsible exit strategy in sight and is likely to remain so for a very long time.

I tend to agree but regardless of your political view on all this there is simply no future of peace in meeting terror with terror.

And then as I watched the ABC news on tv the other night there was an item that moved me to tears..

Almost ten years have passed since a million Tutsis and politically moderate Hutus were systematically decimated in just 100 days in Rwanda. It was the worst genocide humanity had to witness since the Holocaust, and the wounds are still fresh in the memory of survivors.

Thousands of children were orphaned as a result of this tragedy.

The story was about the Rwandan Youth Choir visiting Melbourne a group of young Rwandans of both Tutsi and Hutu descent singing in the striking and evocative harmonies of eastern Africa. Singing songs of peace, forgiveness and reconciliation. To see the hope and life in the faces of these orphaned young people filled me with hope and lifted me out of a heavy sense of despair at the state of the world and my own country's inability to stand for justice and peace.

This Easter we will celebrate the story at the centre of our faith. It is the story of a God of love reaching out to a hurting creation longing to be reconciled with itself and with the Creator who still brings it life and hope.

Will we continue to accept the challenge to part of that hope.....