

Genesis chapter 1, 24 to 31 9.30 am

May the word of my mouth and the thoughts of our heart be acceptable to you O Lord our strength and our redeemer Amen.

The theme today is, “Made in God's image”. And is the first in a series of four Lent sermons on, “Caring for creation”. And undoubtedly the best place to start this first sermon is in Genesis chapter 1, our Old Testament reading today.

And verses 4 to 8 of psalm 8, which we've just heard sung beautifully by the choir, has put the Genesis creation story of human beings into song.

The creation account in Genesis reaches its climax on the sixth day when all living creatures are created, including human beings.

Now regarding human beings, God said, “Let us make humankind in our image.” God was not alone when he created us.

Now you may be interested to know that God created the heavens and the earth, according to the book of Genesis in one short verse at the beginning of chapter 1.

Whereas God took 2 quite long verses in chapter 1 to create all living creatures that walked on the earth other than human beings, but took 7 long verses to create human beings, such was the importance God gave to us, who were created in his image and likeness.

It is in verse 26 that the author of Genesis starts by telling us that God created us in his image and likeness.

But sadly, at the fall of Adam, we lost a good deal of our image and likeness of God, but through faith in Christ we live in hope of redemption and being brought back into the fold.

Now in the physical sense of being in the image of God, those who saw Jesus were privileged to see God incarnate, as St Paul wrote to the Colossians in chapter 1 verse 15, “He, that is Jesus, is the image of the invisible God”.

And in Hebrews chapter 1 verse 3 the author wrote, “He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being”.

I now want to clarify what I believe the writer of Genesis meant by image and what St Paul also meant by image.

It was I believe, regarding Jesus' behaviour; Jesus was in the image of the invisible God through his behaviour, and as the author of Hebrews has it, “The exact imprint of God's very being”.

It's how we behave which makes us in the image of God, not what we look like, and that for us to be in the image of God we too have to behave like him; because when it comes to caring for creation, it's how we behave which is so vitally important, not what we look like.

In the second part of verse 26 there is a significant change in God's message to us, in 26b God says, "Let them have dominion over all living creatures, those who live on the land and those who live in the sea".

That word 'dominion', defines God's purpose and our place in God's creation and plans; we are all to be God's representatives here on earth; God has entrusted us to look after all living creatures from the microscopic to the immense, and of course with that comes considerable responsibility for all of us.

Regarding the word "dominion". The word dominion does not only mean what the Victorian aristocracy may have understood by the word dominion, that is, shoot everything on sight, it means to rule, and as representatives of God in the world our rule must be at least ethical, just and compassionate.

However it was in Genesis 9 verse 3 that God gave us permission to use animals as food, but God did not give permission for cruelty towards them.

We are to take care of God's creatures, to rule implies lordship, but does not imply exploitation, we should also be aware that our very existence depends on the welfare of other species of creature as well, especially the very small, many of which are vital to our food supply.

And of course it goes without saying, that for any living creature to survive, the very planet we live on also has to be protected, along with it's diversity of plants and trees, which protects the very air we breathe, and provides the food that sustains all life on earth.

Verse 27 reinforces that God is the creator of humankind and that he did create us in his image, but as I've already said through our sin we are no longer fully in God's image, however, in Christ there is hope for all of us.

Verse 27 finishes by stating that God made male and female, and in verse 28 God blessed us and told us to be fruitful and multiply.

And to this day couples who come to church for Christian weddings receive God's blessing, indeed those who are married else where can also come here for God's blessing on their marriage.

And God's blessing in verse 27 also reinforces God's plan that through loving relationships of male and female God wanted us to multiply, so that we could dominate the earth and subdue it.

Of course with that comes another responsibility, which is not to over populate the earth beyond it's capacity to sustain all life, which indeed may be one of our current problems.

At the end of verse 28 God reiterates his gift to us of all the fish of the sea, of all the birds of the air and of every moving thing upon the earth, a gift that we are to be good stewards of.

In verse 29 God reminds us that he has also given us every plant that yields seeds, and every tree that yields seeds in it's fruit, which grows on the earth, God has gifted to us, to feed all the creatures which have the breath of life in them.

The last verse of our reading from Genesis tells us that God saw everything that he had made and that it was all very good, and he was very pleased with the result, and that statement alone tells us a lot about how God feels, when he sees us destroy parts of his beautiful creation.

Genesis chapter 1 must be viewed as a covenant or contract between God and the human race, a covenant that if we look after God's earth and the diversity of plants and animals that God has made and which live here; then God's desire that we will live on a beautiful planet will be realised, and God in turn, as we look after his world, he will look after us.

Now we know that there isn't a single mortal thing on this earth that we own, everything is under our stewardship from God; if anybody doesn't believe that then consider how much people take with them when they die.

Now I have no strong regard one way or the other for the landed gentry in this country. I know that in the past they have lived well at poor people's expense, but these days I think the vast majority are more enlightened.

But what I do admire about them is the way they admit to be stewards of the property they have, and that by and large they do their utmost to pass their estates on to their heirs in good order.

It is this strong sense of stewardship that needs to be adopted by the rest of us, if we are to succeed in bringing our destructive nature to heel and start to look after our planet properly.

We may well be at a water shed with regard to looking after our planet. We have to take global warming seriously, we have to find real solutions to plastic waist especially as it affects marine life, and I'm sure that there are many other serious environmental issues that need to be addressed.

Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth. It is essential for sustaining the natural living systems or ecosystems that provide us with food, fuel, health, wealth and other vital things.

Humans are of course a part of this biodiversity, and have the power to protect or destroy it.

Currently, some of our activities are destroying biodiversity at an alarming rate.

Some of these losses are irreversible, and impoverish us all and damage the life support systems we rely on. But we can still prevent those that have not gone too far.

Now the majority of damage caused is way out of our control, such as global warming and plastic in our oceans, which I've already mentioned; these things are for organisations such as the United Nations to deal with, but we can do our bit.

For example the roads, lanes and paths in Sandhurst are often strewn with rubbish, I'm not suggesting that we go out with sacks and pick it up, not that that would be a bad thing to do, if you are able to do so, but at least don't let any of us add to the rubbish.

Where it is possible to walk to a shop let us not use our cars, and I'm sure we all these days take our own bags when shopping and we all recycle according to the councils instructions.

I too have a composter, which I had some years, which recycles all my food waste back into the ground, and I'm sure there are many other ways we can help protect our planet.

I have to say that my concern for the planet is based more around my 4 beautiful grandchildren than it is for me, we must embrace good stewardship of our planet not only for ourselves, but for future generations who may, if we are not careful, look back on our generation with despair and unbelief.

As we sit let us pray,

In a world whose web of life is intricate and beautiful,
save us, Lord, from carelessness and blindness.

In a world where creatures are so varied and vulnerable,
save us, Lord, from plundering and cruelty.

In a world whose waters are fresh and whose oceans should
cleanse,
save us, Lord, from wanton polluting.

In a world where forests protect our air and wild life,
save us, Lord, from systems that drive us to destroy them.

In a world whose fruits are rich and plentiful,
save us, Lord, from waist and greed.