

An Adventure in Beauty and Grace

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sunday 12 September, 2021

A reflective conversation by Members of Glenbrook Uniting and others.

Second Sunday in the Season of Creation - Humanity Sunday.

Psalm 8; Contemporary reading from *The Lorax* by Dr Seuss; John 10: 35-45

This worship service can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

REV ELLIE

Last week, Reverend Jo offered us a wonderful theological foundation to this season of creation. She invited us to think about earth as communion, earth as covenantal relationships and earth as creating anew. As we begin a community conversation, I invite you to listen for these themes being embodied in the stories and images that are shared.

Where have you experienced oneness with creation?

This is the question that I asked ours and Andrew's community as well as our friends and our neighbours and our leaders. And it was important to me that we should listen for voices from our community; voices from different faith traditions, different perspectives on life, with those people with whom we share our common home. And I am immensely grateful to all the people who were able to participate in this conversation.

In many ways what you're about to hear or receive is a beautiful invitation into one another's homes and our backyards. I want to begin by sharing with you a quote from John O'Donohue from his book: *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace*. As I've been pondering his words, it reminds me of how critically important this season of creation is to reorientating our lives, our church and our community. And these words somehow prophetically speak to this season of pandemic that we're in as each one of us seeks to find meaning and purpose in this strange shared life that we are living in right now. So this is what O'Donohue writes:

Traditionally, a journey was a rhythm of three forces: time, self, and space. Now the digital virus has truncated time and space. Marooned on each instant, we have forfeited the practice of patience, the attention to emergence and delight in the eros of discovery, the self has become anxious for what the next instant might bring. The greed for destination obliterates the journey. The digital desire for the single instance schools the mind in false priority. Each instant proclaims its own authority and the present image demands the complete attention of the eye. There is no sense of natural sequence where an image is allowed to emerge from its background and context when the time is right, the eye is worthy and the heart is appropriate. The mechanics of electronic imaging reverses the incarnation of real encounter.

But a great journey needs plenty of time. It should not be rushed. If it is, your life becomes a kind of abstract package tour, devoid of beauty and meaning. There is such a constant world of movement that you never know where you are. You have no time to give yourself

to the present experience. When you accumulate experience at such a tempo everything becomes thin. Consequently you become ever more absent from your life and this fosters emptiness that haunts the heart.

When you regain a sense of your life as a journey of discovery, you return to the rhythm with yourself. When you take the time to travel with reverence, a rich life unfolds before you. Moments of beauty begin to braid your days. When your mind becomes more acquainted with reverence, the light grace and elegance of beauty finds you more frequently. When the destination becomes gracious, the journey becomes an adventure of beauty.

As we listen to these stories and memories and images with reverence, may we encounter within ourselves a sense of the growth and healing that comes from our encounter with God in creation. So let's begin an adventure of beauty and grace.

JAN

You can never do a kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late!

The words of Ralph Waldo Emerson are worth reflection. I once lived on a property growing 108 rose bushes of all colours. My favourites were Blue Moon and Mr Lincoln. The joy of gardening continues. My involvement with green thumbs activities and my fabulous greenhouse. I feel joyful anticipation awaiting the new growth on the bare branches of our huge and wonderful liquidambar tree. How awe-inspiring is a sunrise! The start of a new day and the opportunity to seek beauty in my garden. One morning, when I needed cheering up, I searched an unlikely area where there was a patch of native pig face which produced a most stunning purple flower. My discovery offered a sign that all would be well.

CAROLYN

As a 16 year old, I hiked into blue gum forest in Grose Valley with a group of fellow ranger guides and some boys from our partner rover crew. At the time you were still allowed to camp in the actual forest area. On the Sunday morning I awoke at sunrise and exited the tent. I found myself in God's cathedral. The tall stately eucalypts with their muted bark formed the walls. And high above the very gently murmuring canopy of leaves, the roof.

In the stillness of that morning all my senses were aroused; and then the sun shone through the trees. In the special light of early day, I could actually see the sun's rays pierce the space between the trees and touch the cathedral floor. A pattern of browns – earth, twigs, fallen leaves - all touched with the last of the morning frost. It's a vision so strong that even now, nearly 60 years later, I can still not only see but feel it, when I recall that morning. I walked down to the creek to freshen up, humming the words of the well-known old children's chorus:

*Jesus wants me for a sunbeam
to shine for him each day.*

PETER

The coming of spring! New hopes, new possibilities and renewal. How can you look at the colour of nature and not be enthralled? How can you see the beauty of nature and not be amazed? The astonishing and amazing colour of creation!

SHARON

Greetings Glenbrook Uniting Church. Thanks for having me. I'm Sharon Hollis, President of the Uniting Church Assembly. One of the places I actually feel closest to creation is in my front patio in Brunswick, on the lands of the Wurundjeri people. I've got three veggie boxes, some big planters with fruit trees, some pots with flowers and herbs. I get to plunge my hands into dirt - to grow, to tend, to nurture and to neglect - and to watch it all grow wild, even in those boxes. I watch bees alight on the plants gone to seed; on the flowers I've planted to attract them. I watch butterflies hover and birds rest. It's a place of beauty. It's a place that reminds me that even though I try to manage the creation, I'm never in control of it - and it does its own thing sometimes. I've had wonderful experiences in wild nature, but here in this garden every day, I'm afforded the opportunity to appreciate, to play, to nurture and to marvel at the beauty, the wonder, the magic that is creation.

SARAH and RICHARD

Okay. So Ellie's asked us to put something together about our connection with nature where we live, in the Blue Mountains. I thought this was quite a good time to do it because we've come out for a little walk today in the bush because it's Richard's birthday - and this is something that we often do as a family, on our special days. And we often don't do anything particularly impressive, but just come for a walk in the bush and have some time.

So in the background, the boys have just built a little fire we're just going to put a billy on and have a cup of tea. And we just find that, when we do these things, everybody relaxes into the place. Everyone can just be themselves. We're happy with each other and the place. And it's the opportunity - I love the opportunity of teaching the boys that, and giving them the opportunity to practice about, you know, lighting a fire, collecting water, you know shelters. And they've grown up with them feeling very comfortable in this environment. Richard?

It's their home. We moved up here because we love this place, and I've come up here since I was a kid. It's great that our two sons are not just born here but they've just got this really strong connection with the Blue Mountains, you know. It's their playground and we try not to focus on the four walls of the house every day, but just reconnect and get out here on days like this. Its home for me.

PEGGY

There's a beautiful scribbly gum down the national park track as you walk from Woodford to Glenbrook. And I have been watching that over 36 years and feel very much at home there. I think, to feel at one with creation, you need to know the nature around you. You need to have seen it through all seasons. To have experienced it even through fire - and this scribbly gum has seen two hazard reductions in the last 20 years. To go through all seasons.

At times, Jim and I called it our silver tree. But at other times it was a golden colour. And then you'd later see the bark coming off in great strips and lying at its feet. And that is a very special place for me because, where in the service for those who've passed away, it says *from dust to dust* - that's where Jim's ashes lie. And it is both a place where I feel very much at home, and I have been watching the flannel flowers come back after the latest fires in 2019. So the place is very familiar to me and I feel very much at home there.

CAROLYN

I'm on a pathway, on the edge, close to Gordon Falls reserve. I'm new here, one of many travellers. Others have walked before me. Thank you Gundungurra and Dharug people. When I turn, I gaze on a perfect painting. Lush green of giant ferns, now just behind me; and grey green gum trees frame my view. King's Tableland, with its burnished gold and just a tiny glimpse of the end of Mount Solitary. Then a faint blue sheet of water which is Warragamba dam in the distance. Pale blue, Blue Mountain blue, sky blue, ever receding picture of perfect loveliness - fills me each time I come here with the beauty of God's creation and my heart sings in gratitude.

WILLIAM

I'm standing here at Elysian Rock, about a kilometre, or less than a kilometre, from where I live in Leura. And this is where I like to come most mornings, or sometimes in the afternoons. The afternoons in particular have a beautiful colour. The escarpment has a lovely honeycombed sort of colour to it if you look. Look around me here this is beautiful honeycomb escarpment. You can see it all circle, it circles all around. Behind me is the magnificent Mount Solitary. The Three Sisters are just over there. Narrow Neck, which goes almost all the way out to Mount Solitary is over there. This is a fabulous place to come and I feel so blessed to be able to come and just be quiet and look for miles and miles and kilometres and kilometres into the distance and just relax.

PETER

I lift my eyes to the mountains. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. It's hard not to be inspired by creation, sitting out here at this unnamed lookout in Springwood. Absolute beautiful reflection of God's amazing creation.

DALIA

In these difficult times in the pandemic, I just wanted to show you all these beautiful daffodils that my husband planted, which are bringing me so much joy. I love looking at that bright yellow against this grey world because it reminds me that we're all going to come through this.

IAN

When I think of the season of creation, I'm reminded of Ecclesiastes 3, 1: *For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven, a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to harvest.* We've just ended the season of winter when many plants are dormant or bare; and now at the beginning of this season of spring, we experience the next season of creation, with this new growth; and we just have the first blossoms of the weeping cherry tree.

PHILIP

Well, Ellie said do a video about oneness with creation. I thought that was going to be quite challenging because I'm not a religious person as such. But then it started to rain and I went out into the garden and I was just hit by that beautiful fragrance that you get at springtime! And I thought, wow, this is oneness with creation! I'm just staring now at my veggie beds, in which, of course, everything is springing as it should do in spring. The peas are coming out, the salad's going crazy, the blossom is appearing everywhere on the fruit trees.

And, as I said, the backdrop to all of that is this rain that's come after a little dry spell. You know when you just get the beautiful aroma of - I don't know what it is? It's freshness but it's so uplifting and so exciting. It kind of marks the end of winter and the beginning of spring. And of course creation, literally, nature's bringing back to life - and you get that sense of - well there's more in this world than just you. There's all of this stuff too and there's this cycle that continues and will continue to perpetuate well beyond my life. And I find that exciting and uplifting and helps me to keep everything in perspective.

SIMON (Moderator)

When you ask me to think about this, the immediate memory I have is a time lying in a paddock around midnight. And I'd just moved from the city to the country and we're outside Dubbo on a property. And the wind came down through the trees and we could hear the wind before we felt it. We were lying on our backs around midnight and then out in the middle of the paddock. There was nothing to be seen but the stars from horizon to horizon, and this sense of being both infinitesimally small in the universe - but at the same very moment very much a part of it.

It was an extraordinary experience. The silence - and then the wind - and then the stars and the wonder and being part of it all. And as we looked and listened that's all there was. Nothing else to distract or surprise and we were caught in the middle of it. I remember being very, very thankful for a God who is both architect and companion. The one who creates and the one who walks beside us.

ELIZABETH

I experience oneness with creation when I get to share it with children. I know vistas and landscapes are beautiful to many. They are to me too. But I've always experienced oneness with creation in the joy I feel with small things: insects, small flowers, rocks. The God of small things.

SCOTT

I guess I feel a one-ness with creation most when I'm out on a bush walk and I'm sitting on a rock ledge, looking out over a big gully, seeing how the sky meets the mountains and the trees and looking at the cliff faces. Yeah I always feel closest, I guess, to creation and God probably at those times.

Yet when I really think about it, even when I just go for a walk around the block, if I take the time just to look at the trees and to look at the plants that people are growing and the flowers and listen to the birds as they fly about, I also have that sense of creation and wonder.

But then, when I think about it, even when I'm sitting at home and sitting in my office like I am now, and looking out the window at the trees and looking out the other window in front of me where I can see our chickens chook'n about, I also get that sort of sense of oneness with creation and wonder.

And yet, I guess when I think about it, I really don't have to go anywhere. it's really just about slowing down and thinking about what a wonderful place God has created for us to live in. and that's all I really need.

So thanks for the question Ellie, that's all I need to do. Just to slow down and think about it.

CAROLYN

I have a self-sown pittosporum undulatum in my backyard. It's my most un-favourite tree, growing in the wrong place, taking all the sunshine from the lawn below and dropping horrid little husks from its not terribly spectacular orange berries. However I could not bring myself to remove it. Then in early spring last year, just after David died, I had cause to get up in the middle of a very dark night. When I looked out of the bedroom window there was just enough light from the bedside lamp for me to see a myriad of stars being reflected back at me. It felt like a host of tiny angels keeping watch. On closer examination it was the little white spring flowers of the pittosporum, hardly noticeable in the daytime. And it was enough of God's glory to put a drop of resilience into my almost empty life bucket at that time.

EILIDH

For me, there's so many moments I could pick that I've truly felt connected with creation but, I'm going to pick a fairly recent one actually. I took a trip to Maroubra beach to get my allotted amount of exercise that I was allowed. And sitting on the rocky headlands overlooking the beach just really truly made me realize how powerful creation is. And as much as we're able to gain something from it that we live and we thrive off of creation, so too is it in charge of us too. And I think that that's a beautiful metaphor for how we are both at God's mercy and embraced by him too. Creation really reflects our relationship with God.

HENRY

"A Special Outside Place" by Henry Goodwin. What is it? Mount Sion Park. I chose that place because it was very close to my house that we go there often. I have a strong bond with it. Map. Three Reasons: the next three slides show why I chose this place. Reason one: there's lots of nature. Reason two: there are good dirt trails. Reason three: there are always lots of paths to go down. Thank you.

SUREKA

I was 21, just arrived in Australia. My fiancé and all my friends were more than 15 000 kilometres away. My real life seemed a million miles away - and I had never felt so lonely, so isolated and estranged in my life. I went walking in the Blue Mountains with a friend visiting from the UK. We walked, and he told me all the news and showed me pictures and tried to paint me back into the picture I had left. He saw my loneliness. We paused on the edge of a ridge silently gazing at the valley stretching out in front of us, with eucalypts covering every slope, millions of trees surrounding us. Overhead and behind and as far ahead as we could see, the wind stirred, the trees tossed their leafy heads and the rustle rose and fell in waves around us.

Don't forget, my friend said. The gum trees are your friends. It was just a flotsam thought, I think but I felt strangely comforted. I felt those trees connected to each other, their roots deep in the mountain rock, one with the skin of the living earth, connecting me to everyone I loved and all else beside. They were part of something vast and old and magnificent. They didn't quibble about details, but just wrapped me up in their presence. It wasn't just connectedness but an essential kindness that I glimpsed. Beauty and grace gifted to me with affection. Peace for my soul heart. For just a moment I felt held in the warm embrace of life on a grander scale than my own. I was insignificantly small, yet known and welcomed. Even now, every time I walk in the bush, I tell myself the gum trees are my friends.

KIRSTY

For me, times that I feel at one with creation: sitting near a beautiful pond, seeing reflections. Sunset and the glorious colours and glow as the sun goes down. Hearing animals calling to one another, birds, frogs. Seeing new life: lambs, flowers in spring, hearing the breeze as it blows through the trees and rustles the leaves. There are so many things that help me just to feel calm and at peace with creation. A most beautiful world that we live in, given to us to protect, to look after by God.

CHRIS

In the last couple of years, Florabella Street has had an influx of new residents many with young children and/or dogs. Due to COVID, more residents are exercising their dogs, children, and even themselves. Many have turned out to be keen gardeners. There also seem to be more neighbours keeping chickens and bee hives. It's really lovely to be able to get fresh eggs and honey in our own street. Even better when little kids tell you that they love your messy garden and teenagers are getting indoor plants for their collection.

GARETH

Hello everyone. I've been thinking about a song that I've taken to for a number of years, which I have played every now and again. It's called Creator and Poet and I'll read to you the last verse. But I'll give you a prelim as to why I'm reading it. It is about being co-creators with God and here is the verse:

*God you have made us of stardust and spirit
etching your image on every cell
we are your love song your poem and rhythm
all co-creators your story to tell*

I'm really taken by the understanding of being co-creators with God, and Karyn and I have been trying to co-create with God, a riverbed. We've tried to mimic it. We've tried to imitate it by observing what riverbeds look like. And over there you'll see what we've tried to do. Because a whole lot of water comes down through the lawn and pools, so to speak, at the bottom there; and it has killed several plants and we thought "*well if you can't beat it join it*". So instead of fighting creation, we've decided to basically co-create with God - and that is the result. We're yet to see the fruits of our labour and hopefully the water will pool down there. Things will come to life - like frogs might take to it and we'll just wait and see.

KARYN

Having a garden reminds me so much of God's presence in the world, providing for us season by season. One of the favourite seasons has to be spring, because it's full of new blossoms and new shoots and the promise of new life. Some very Christian and resurrection images there. I guess in life we often don't necessarily like those correlations too much. We like spring but we don't like winter; and we don't like autumn so much. But they're rest times and yet winter is probably one of the busiest times when so much is happening in the deep roots of the earth for the new life to come. And I look over at this rather young, but quite happy, orange tree that's got some new shoots on it and lots of buds with the promise of fruit. So it reminds me of life and the seasons we go through. And we're going through a season now aren't we? A COVID season, a pandemic season. A lot is happening behind the scenes and we have to tend and be careful to it so that the season that comes, the spring, is full of life.