

Why and how do we celebrate the Season of *Creation*?

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sunday 18 September 2022

A Reflection by Warren Talbot, Lyn Eggins and Gerard McEville

Creation 3C

Psalm 19:1-6; Luke 8:22-25; Contemporary Reading: *The Rocks Pulsate* by George F MacLeod, Iona Community

The video of this reflection can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/> The version below is not a transcript, but the script from which the reflector spoke, so there may be some changes of wording.

WARREN Why?

In our shared reflection this morning, Lyn Eggins is going to share something of the work of volunteers assisting at Sydney's Olympic Park. This is local, practical environmental care at its best. Gerard McEville is going to share some of the work and effort of the Pitt Street Earthweb Team, which ranges from the local, such as our use of energy here at Pitt Street, through to global efforts to achieve climate justice.

But, first, I have a question to ask. Actually, it's not my question. Five years ago, during the Season of Creation, our then Minister-in-Placement, Margaret Mayman, asked an important question. Some of you may remember it...anyone?

Why, Margaret asked, do we celebrate the Season of Creation rather than simply the Season of the Environment? What difference does it make? Isn't it just semantics?

I remember the question because it took me some time to begin to answer. And, some days, I'm still not sure. It's been on my mind recently, because I've been doing the paperwork for ARRCC – the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change – to apply for tax deductibility status with the Australian Taxation Office.

You won't be surprised to learn that the tax office doesn't have a category for creation, or even Earth. Fortunately, it does have a category for the "natural environment". So, in ARRCC, we've had to make changes to our constitution. But, as you'll hear from Thea Ormerod next Sunday, that doesn't change ARRCC's mission to care for creation.

Today's Psalm, and the contemporary reading, are very suggestive in terms of responding to the question of five years ago.

The Psalmist boldly declares that the heavens are telling the glory of God, day by day and night by night. God has provided a canopy for the sun. Our cosmology might be different, but there is a sense of something more, of connections. And it's not all about homo sapiens.

The Psalmist is acutely aware of the paradox of creation. On the one hand they write that there is no speech, no words coming from the heavens. But immediately they appear to contradict themselves – the voice of the heavens goes out to the entire earth, and these heavenly words go to the end of the world.

The poem/prayer from George MacLeod is one of my favorites when reflecting on creation. I've never been to Iona, but I'm told by people who have, that the rocks really do "pulsate".

Here is my still tentative answer to Margaret's question: the language of "the environment" does not speak, does not have words. The natural environment just is. And, of course, there is a fair degree of legitimate self-interest in homo sapiens looking after the environment.

In contrast the language of creation does speak – day and night, from one end of the earth to the other. More than simply being there, creation evokes, creation insists, creation invites.

To borrow a distinction from Paul Ricoeur, the environment seeks explanation and analysis, creation calls for understanding and connection. The environment is to be examined carefully in a rigorous scientific manner. Environmental protection must always be based on good science.

But within the circle of faith, Creation calls for more – for understanding, as well as explanation. Ricoeur calls this a "*surplus of meaning*". Creation calls us to engage in the dimension of what Liesa Clague shared last Sunday in the languages of First peoples - dadirri and gan'na - deep listening and connections.

Let's protect the natural environment – and care for creation.

Reference: Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

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## LYN Volunteers at Sydney's Olympic Park

This is just a glimpse of the care being given by management and volunteers to Sydney Olympic Park- fondly known as Sydney's Beating Green Heart.

Located on the traditional land of the Wann-gal people on the Parramatta River, it is not just a sport and entertainment hub.

The built environment at Olympic Park is enhanced by a large and beautiful span of salt and freshwater lakes and streams, forests, and grasslands providing habitat for many permanent and migratory species of many genera.

Some are rare and threatened, including plants, birds, amphibians, fish, microbats, reptiles and mammals, living around a playground and recreation space for Sydneysiders.

The whole area is under the care of Sydney Olympic Park Authority, and managed by a huge permanent staff of ecologists and volunteers from interest groups.

These volunteer events help Sydney Olympic Park to understand if management is being successful, or if changes need to be made to retain the Parks incredible biodiversity.

Just to name a few of the ways in which this is done:

- Conservation Volunteers Australia improve frog movement corridors across the Park. Olympic Park supports a priority population of the endangered Green and Golden Bell Frog and has a long-term habitat management program for this species. These awesome volunteers clear weeds, and plant native tussock forming grasses that will assist the Green and Golden Bell Frog to move between the ponds they inhabit.
- Volunteers from the Frog and Tadpole Study Group undertake auditory frog surveys to record calling frogs and help understand where the endangered Green and Golden Bell Frog is breeding.
- Members of the Cumberland Bird Observers Club and others undertake the Annual Spring Bird Census to identify trends and changes in bird population. This information is used to implement and manage intervention strategies. This is an annual 8-week survey, and the 2022 Spring Bird Census represents the 18th annual survey of birds across Sydney Olympic Park.
- The original landscape design at Kronos Hill in the centre of the Park was for low grass and tall eucalyptus trees - perfect habitat for Noisy Miners!
- The Spring Bird Census documented the loss of small woodland birds at the same time as populations of urban-adapted birds such as the aggressive native Noisy Miner were increasing. To support greater numbers of the smaller woodland bird species, a middle story of vegetation needed to be inserted under the trees with mulch and log piles, to provide more food resources, and discourage Noisy Miners. The Spring Bird Census continues to monitor the success of this change in habitat complexity.
- The Spring Bird Census also identified in 2006 that Red-rumped Parrot numbers were declining at the Park. In response, nest boxes specifically designed for this species were installed in several places across the Park. The parrots seemed to be best impressed with the boxes at Archery Park, and so, in recent years, many more nest boxes have been installed there to support a growing population of these lovely little parrots. Again, monitoring programs help Park management to understand parrot preference of box size, material and orientation to improve the project.

All in all, Sydney Olympic Park is being cared for well by management and volunteers alike.



The “Earthweb Team” provides a focus for Pitt St activities around ecology including climate change. Fiona Bennett and I share the role of convening the group.

Caring for Creation is quite a big task, so we are very strategic in choosing what to focus on.

We see this as three levels...

### **Firstly, our building and operations**

Everything we buy or use at this church has an environmental impact. We think it is important to minimise this as a community, to model the action we desperately need from large polluters and governments.

Change in a community is never easy but Earthweb’s role is to facilitate change by offering suggestions, whether it’s about energy-efficient light globes or heating options. The wonderful Pitt St community is always open to these discussions and so, together we are making progress to zero emissions by 2030 at the latest.

### **Secondly Congregational awareness and education**

This is about each of us individual Pitt Streeters making a difference through our own actions. Maybe through switching our own power provider, or looking at where our super is invested.

We regularly put info in the weekly e-news and have set up an ecology table with a wide range of resources to use or books to borrow. Many of these resources, along with the liturgy from these Season of Creation services give so many helpful perspectives on why Caring for Creation is intrinsic to our faith journeys.

Among these many faith perspectives is the demand to seek justice. Every little thing I can refuse, re-use, or re-cycle reduces the legacy of landfill I’m leaving my grand-daughter. But it can seem so futile when we look at what’s happening around us, right now.

How is it just for our brothers and sisters in Pakistan to be underwater when collectively they have hardly touched the carbon dial? This brings us to our third point of focus...

### **Engagement with wider faith and community group activities:**

As I said, we are trying to model the action we desperately need from large polluters and governments. But modelling is not enough – we also need to get their attention... what can we few people do? Well, we partner with other groups – this is more efficient and also more effective.

1. Firstly with our community here in the city by sharing our space and sharing movies that move us and encourage our work for a better planet... helping manage those events might be your role with Earthweb – we are looking for your help!

2. Secondly through the wider Uniting Church. We have engaged with Synod and agitated to make climate advocacy a high priority through the Uniting Climate Action Network (UCAN).
3. Thirdly through people of many faiths via the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC). And through ARRCC to multi-faith events around the world like the one on 13<sup>th</sup> October which in Sydney will be at St Pats Cathedral in Parramatta – all are welcome.
4. ARRCC also links us to the wider climate movement which in Australia is focused on stopping the flow of money to opening up a staggering 69 new coal mines for export. At Pitt St we have started a conversation with the staff at our nearest bank. But I can assure you, we are being much more polite than Jesus was with the money lenders at the temple

So that's Earthweb - taking action individually, as a congregation and with the community. Thanks so much for your challenges and ideas, and for helping us to seek justice through events, letter-writing or just treading a bit more lightly on God's earth.