

# Oceans of Life

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 04 September 2016

A Contemporary Reflection by Rev Dr Margaret Mayman

Creation 1C - Oceans

Psalm 104:1-9, 24-26; Luke 5: 1-11

This reflection can be viewed on You Tube at <http://www.pittstreetuniting.org.au/> under "Sunday Reflections" tab

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September is spring. September is the season of creation.

Around the world, many churches have become acutely aware of the environmental crisis. Our precious planet is at risk. So congregations have celebrated Earth Day, World Environment Day or St Francis of Assisi Day.

The season of Creation began as an Australian story, initiated by Norman Habel and St Stephen's Lutheran Church in Adelaide. The Uniting Church provided funding to develop the three-year cycle of resources which, since 2005, have been widely used by churches around the world.

This Sunday we celebrate the ocean and we mourn the enormous damage that has been done to the ocean by human action.

The images that Pitt Street people have contributed to the slide show are a tribute to our love of the ocean. Australia is a continent, but it is also an island, surrounded by some of the most beautiful coastline on earth. The beach is for many of us a sacred place, a place imbued with awe and mystery, where we become aware of the vastness of creation and our small place within it. The beach is a place that stirs our sense of wonder. The beach is a place of play, of family memories, but also a place of danger. There are tides and currents and undertows. And in of Australia, there are box jellyfish and sharks and salt-water crocodiles ...

Putting those thoughts aside for a minute, do you remember the first time that you paddled or swam in the sea? Remember the salt air and the taste of the sea on your lips. I remember my Andrew going into the sea on Log Island Sound when he was a little boy – and taking a great big mouthful of it – because he didn't know it was salty! Water, up to that point had been quite drinkable. The things we need to explain!

Do you remember those early encounters with sea? The splash of waves on your feet, sand between your toes, the endless horizon where sea meets skies.

These memories are gifts inviting us to connect with creation and the very Ground of All Being.

In the season of creation, as we remember with thankfulness the ocean, we must also acknowledge our alienation from Earth and the oceans. We have enjoyed the beach on countless holidays but back home we have not thought of the ocean when we have consumed goods and discarded waste that has ended up in the sea.

We have polluted Earth's waters with toxins, and killed millions of species in the ocean.

We have turned our greed into global warming.

We have helped cause arctic regions to melt.

We have loved progress more than we have loved the planet.

What would it mean to think about the crisis of the oceans theologically? This crisis of destruction imposes more than an ethical duty on us; it confronts us with a spiritual crisis. We are destroying one of the deep mysteries God has given us to explore, one of the places of God's presence.

The gospel reading reminds us that Jesus had a special relationship with the sea, and with the people whose livelihood depended on the inland sea of Galilee. The story of Peter is interesting. In the midst of the encounter with Jesus, he announces that he is a sinner. But Jesus doesn't let him dwell there. It's almost as if he is saying to Peter: *stop feeling sorry for yourself. You have work we have to do.*

There is wisdom in this for us. The environmental crisis can cause us to feel overwhelmed by human sinfulness in relation to creation. We may feel powerless and hopeless in the face of corporate greed and political intransigence.

But Jesus responds to Peter by giving him a challenge. Norman Habel suggests that Jesus not only brings his disciples face to face with the waters of the deep, "*but with the cosmic mysteries of redemption, forgiveness, wisdom and hope. For this Christ is destined to 'gather up' all things in the cosmos—the seas, the stars and the skies—and once again unite them according to creation's plan.*"

I truly believe that the global crisis of the environment will not be solved by proclamations of our sin, but by the annunciation of spirit and hope that connects us to the source of life.

But we do need to work on making those connections. We have remembered the beaches that we love, the depths that we fear, the expansiveness of which we are in awe. As we move through the season of creation, may we remember the ocean when we contemplate the plastic that we too often purchase unthinkingly. May we remember the ocean when we choose our means of transport, and our sources of energy. May we remember the ocean when our political activism energy wanes. May our experiences and memories of beaches and ocean enable us hold on to hope of a world renewed.

And may our connection to Spirit and the company of our community here at Pitt Street, provide us with encouragement and energy for the journey of caring for creation.

(Then followed a Power Point presentation of ocean images)