

# Cosmos Sunday

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 25 September 2016

A Contemporary Reflection by The Pitt St Uniting EarthWeb Team

Creation 4C 2016

Psalm 148; Proverbs 8: 1, 22-29

Contemporary Reading from: *The Pale Blue Dot* by Carl Sagan

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

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## **Introduction - Warren Talbot**

Carl Sagan reminds us that planet earth, the pale blue dot, is the only home we have.

The challenge is to think cosmically - and act locally.

This morning's contemporary reflection is being shared by four people from the Pitt St Uniting EarthWeb Team.

Meredith Knight is going to talk about her involvement in the community choir, Ecopella, as one way of highlighting and protesting ecological concerns.

Gerard McEvilly, a horticulturalist by profession, is going to talk about worm farming.

Vivien Langford is going to draw on her experience with a community radio program, Beyond Zero Emissions, to highlight concerns about climate change.

Finally, Jolyon Bromley is going to read from Bill McKibben, the founder of the activist organisation 350.org. Bill McKibben takes us back to the global stage with a provocative image of what is really happening with global warming.

## **1 Meredith Knight**

I am a member of Ecopella which is an environmental choir that sings about the beauty of the world and the struggle to protect it from exploitation and degradation. Music is a powerful medium that can communicate a message which encourages positive change in people's thoughts, attitudes and behaviour. Through our motto "*causing harmony to the environment*", Ecopella takes our educational message into a variety of communities, embracing a wide range of events including benefit concerts, campaign launches, community gatherings, protest rallies and folk and choral festivals.

Our performances include rousing protest songs and topics on everything from global warming to laments about the loss of forests and animal species, the ills of fossil fuel practices, the importance of renewables and ways of adopting a more ecologically-sustainable lifestyle.

Over the past year Ecopella has supported the affirmative actions of local communities and activists including:

- gathering outside the offices of Origin Energy in Martin Place during their 2015 AGM to draw attention to the suicide the week before of third generation farmer, George Bender, whose soil and water supply in Queensland's Darling Downs had been poisoned by coal seam gas bores over which he had had no control. Bender had battled to keep Origin off his land for over ten years enduring a campaign of threats and relentless bullying. Sadly, many other rural and indigenous communities throughout Australia are suffering these same tactics from gas and mining companies.
- supported campaigns against the planned relocation of the historic township of Bulga, in the Hunter Valley, threatened by the expansion of a Rio Tinto open-cut coal mine.
- Joining the Knitting Nannas and other activists, outside the offices of AGL and Santos remonstrating their harmful fossil fuel activities and outside NSW Parliament decrying the State Government's stringent new protest laws.
- We have mourned with Eastern Suburbs residents and others the government-sanctioned destruction of magnificent trees outside Centennial Park to make way for a light rail. We are currently dissenting the destruction of native bushland at Wolli Creek and trees in Sydney Park, for the highly-questionable WestConnex Motorway.

Ecopella is a very busy choir; we perform at well over 60 diverse events every year. We sing many lively and satirical songs and even when the mood becomes serious, the beauty and solemnity of the music is uplifting.

Most of our songs are written by choir members; we have released two CDs with another one on the way. The Choir has branches in Sydney and other parts of NSW and the ACT which regularly meet together for rehearsal weekends and performances. We are always on the look-out for more members. Ecopella is welcoming, inclusive and we love to have fun. To me, there is nothing quite as energising and inspiring as singing with others about something about which I feel and believe in so passionately: our amazing Mother Earth.

<http://www.ecopella.org>

## 2 Gerard McEvilly

I got a bit confused because I thought our topic this week was compost not cosmos. But when I looked up cosmos it means "*the universe regarded as a complex and orderly system – the opposite of chaos.*"

So compost is not that different – it's a chaotic mixture of all sorts of what we regard as waste – banana peel, rotten cabbage from the back of the fridge, tea bags – a chaotic mixture that composting turns into a uniform crumbly fertile product. This can be used to grow healthy plants and so complete the cycle.

So that's one of the environmental benefits, it turns waste into goodness and we certainly need less waste. In fact we are running out of places to dump landfill – just imagine how much diesel is burned carting our waste away – and honestly what a legacy to leave our grandchildren!

But our kitchen scraps are much much worse than just wasted resources – they are actually dangerous to the planet. Please don't think they just break down harmlessly in landfill. They do break down, but because of the lack of air this breakdown produces methane gas, which is one of the greenhouse gases – 84 times more potent than CO<sub>2</sub>.

When we downsized to a unit from a house and garden, I had to downsize my composting activity too so I got a free worm farm from the council and started using worms to do the same job on a small scale. I encourage you to consider this and am happy to assist in fact I have brought some along today - especially for Sue and Syd who are just getting theirs going,

So firstly worm farming turns waste into plant food

Secondly, it massively decreases what you send off to landfill

Thirdly it makes a big difference to greenhouse gas emissions

It might even be free if you have a friendly council.

So think about it - it's a small thing we can all do to make a cosmic difference.

In some churches they bless the animals – but do we ever think of blessing the worms?

### 3 Vivien Langford

Radio catches people in an intimate way. So, even though people don't want to talk to me about climate change, they might be fascinated by a scientist in Antarctica reading an ice core. She might tell us about the human impact on the atmosphere in the recent industrial era, visible to her in the ice. Listeners might then think for a moment about the cosmic threat our emissions are creating.

I produce a one hour podcast every Monday at Radio 3CR. We report on climate action in the community. There are two battlefronts as I see it. The battle against coal and gas and the battle for renewables and a decarbonised economy.

The first battlefront is where farmers and citizens fight off the coal and gas companies who are ripping up the land and using up and even poisoning the underground water. When I interview them, they often are not keen to talk about the climate impact of the coal and gas, but when they win, as recently at Caroona Downs and Gloucester and hopefully soon the Liverpool Plains, the carbon that's not mined is like a climate bomb that is never exploded.

I've come to really love these country people who've made allies with us in the city, inviting us into their struggle, forgetting political divisions and uniting us. I feel I have to be a channel also for the grief, when people are forced to leave. One example is the Bylong Valley. I got a letter from a farmer there who's been the mainstay of the local Progress Association. They have been active preserving farmland against the mines but he has decided to sell. His partner cannot stand the strain anymore and I can identify with that.

Kepeco, the South Korean Mining company will buy their place but there will be a gag-clause once the contract is signed. He writes "*No media, no social media, no protesting, no letter writing, no sticking up for what's right (even if there are wrongs being done) and definitely no submissions or presentations to the Planning Assessment Commission- forever and ever Amen*"

He continues "*If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?...If a mine (any mine) destroys a valley and no one is there to see it and no one is able to say anything, is it really all that bad?*"

This man has a very large and cosmic view of his responsibility to the land and to his neighbours. I will make sure that this tree falling will make a very loud crash on the radio. I'll interview others in the valley who can tell the story and we'll make sure our 10,000 listeners know that the climate war is ruthless. It is also profoundly lonely in my case, as most people do NOT want to talk about climate action.

So some of us are at war, even though the connotations are terrible.

My show for tomorrow is about mobilising as in WW2. This is the second battlefront where an urgent roll out of renewable energy, energy efficiency, re-forestation and a change in consumer behaviour is planned and achieved without crushing the economy. People who talk about this invoke a Second World War mobilisation.

Bill McKibben in a recent article says "*We're under attack from climate change and our only hope is to mobilize as we did in WW2.*" Now Bill McKibben, apart from being the founder of 350.ORG, is a Methodist Sunday school teacher, so his aim is to inspire and energise people... to remind them of the immorality of doing nothing about climate change. I have asked Jolyon to read a part of McKibben's article but just before that we'll hear a little bit of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in a fireside chat.

I listened to a lot of them to prepare my radio show and found that sometimes he had an audience of 60 million people tuning in at 10 pm. He'd ask them to have a map to hand so he could explain where the hot points of the war were and why they had to make a massive effort to supply food, armaments and soldiers to embattled Europe. He didn't appeal to hatred and fear but inspired confidence and belief in the creativity of the people. Imagine if our leaders today included us all and took us along in a decarbonising project we could be proud of! So here is FDR and then Jolyon will read part of McKibben's article "A world at war" -

#### **4 Jolyon Bromley**

The founder of 350.org, Bill McKibben, describes the reality of global warming as a "world war". That is a provocative idea. Bill McKibben writes:

"In the North this summer, a devastating offensive is underway. Enemy forces have seized huge swathes of territory; with each passing week, another 22,000 square miles of Arctic ice disappears...

In the Pacific this spring, the enemy staged a daring breakout across thousands of miles of ocean, waging a full-scale assault on the region's coral reefs. In a matter of months, long stretches of formations like the Great Barrier Reef—dating back past the start of human civilization and visible from space—were reduced to white bone-yards...

World War III is well and truly underway. And we are losing. It's not that global warming is like a world war. It *is* a world war. And we are losing...

We're used to war as metaphor: the war on poverty, the war on drugs. Usually this is just a rhetorical device, a way of saying, "We need to focus our attention and marshal our forces to fix something we don't like."

But this is no metaphor. By most of the ways we measure wars, climate change is the real deal: Carbon and methane are seizing physical territory, sowing havoc and panic, racking up casualties, and even destabilizing governments.

The question is not, are we in a world war? The question is, will we fight back? And if we do, can we actually defeat an enemy as powerful and inexorable as the laws of physics?"

Bill McKibben's words are challenge to each of us – to be better informed, and to do what we can to save our planet, the only home we have.