

Sheltering Sky

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 16 September 2018

A Contemporary Reflection by Rev Dr Margaret Mayman

Creation 3B – Sky Sunday

Psalm 19:1-6; Gospel: Mark 15: 33-39;

Contemporary Reading: “Beatitudes for Earth Sunday” by Richard S Gilbert

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

The season of creation moves on – from earth, to humanity, to Sky – to sheltering sky.

Humans have long associated the moods of sky with human emotions...

Two examples are found in mid-twentieth century popular songs.

Blue skies smiling at me
Nothing but blue skies do I see
Blue birds singing a song
Nothing but blue skies from now on...

When everything is going fine we often see it in terms of fine weather and blue skies.
But when things go wrong we often see it as “Stormy Weather”!

Don't know why
There's no sun up in the sky
Stormy weather
Since my man and I ain't together
Keeps raining all of the time...

Sometimes the sky reflects our moods and sometimes it influences them. A day like yesterday, with clear skies and unseasonable warmth lifts the spirits of city dwellers, but for farmers the unseasonable heat no doubt raised anxiety about the ongoing drought and the increased risk of fires.

In the daylight the sky seems close enough to touch. At night it opens our world to the universe. Thanks to the Hubble telescope we know that the sky has no limits or boundaries, new stars are forming and dying, and dancing in a living creative process.

From the beginning of time human beings have glorified in the world around them, in all its extraordinary diversity, and striven to communicate joy and wonder.

Our ancestors in faith, the Hebrew people, saw the sky as a window to the heavens, to the realm of the Divine, part of a three tier, hierarchical universe: They responded with profound praise: *"The heavens are telling the glory of God."*

While science has given us a different knowledge of earth and sky, like the ancients we stand in awe and wonder at the beauty and immensity of a universe. Paying attention to sky in the season of creation is an exercise in perspective, de-centring human aspirations, challenging the thoughtlessness of our consumption of creation.

We cannot simply romanticise the sky in ways that let us avoid the damage that is being done to earth's atmosphere.

If indeed *"the heavens tell the glory of God,"* then desecration of sky with exhaust and with carbon and with coal and with nuclear clouds, can be likened to the desecration of a profound artwork of indescribable beauty.

As we contemplate our response to the planet's pain, we are called to pay attention to sky and sun and air... to contemplate what it is to live in sustainable inter-dependence.

In Mark's version of Jesus' passion, we hear the anguish of the sky in sympathy. At noon darkness covers the whole land and Jesus cries out to God from that darkness. Jesus' profound connection to the Creator is manifest in the suffering of Creation.

Though we may now have more knowledge about physics and astronomy, the sky continues to evoke in humans a spiritual response.

Cenacle sister Anne Powell, drew on ee cummings to express the anguish of Jesus' female friend, at the loss of his sheltering sacred presence, in her poem *"All my stars."*

Woman of the Upper Room
what did you tell them
of your boy
dead too soon?

That he was mobbed
and robbed by bandits
for enriching others?

That he was stoned
and broken
for mending lives?

Woman of the Upper Room
what did you tell them
of your boy
dead too soon?

A lump as big as the earth
quakes your soul.
*They've killed my sun
my moon and all my stars.*

Indigenous Australians see reflections of earth's creatures in the sky. Kamilaroi man Ben Flick speaks of the emu in the sky, connecting the emu to traditional knowledge determining sustainable human relationships with earth.

Indigenous poet Ali Cobby E Eckermann has written a sky and earth poem titled:

"A Kangaroo Is In The Sky."

a kangaroo is in the sky	see me in my form
the moon is in the water	ask me my story
a tree is inside me	read my bark
it is family	sit in my shade
standing grounded	look for the moon
always growing	in the water
I am wooden	climb into me
my stance as limbs	look at the sky
a message to my kin	a kangaroo is there

Rachel Collis and Pete van Drempt's song "*Golden Age*" reflects on coming to consciousness, to awareness of life's meaning, in the morning of each day, at the moment when dawn and darkness coalesce. It invites mindfulness about the gift of our one life, with its joy and its pain. It invites us to embrace the golden age, which is not to be found in some far-off perfected future but in the ambiguity of the everyday present on earth.

Italian poet Franco Loi's poem, "*How I Love the World, The Air, Its Breath*" also reminds me of the gift of sky for western lives lived in busy, urban environments like ours. Though the stars may be less visible, obscured by our manufactured light, the night sky brings us home to ourselves and our world.

He writes (this is the translation in English from the Italian):

How I love the world, the air, its breath!
the trees, the grass, the sun, those houses, the lovely streets, the ever-changing
moon, the ivy over the houses;
I like the saltiness of the sea, mad kidding about,
cups between friends, fir-trees in the wind
and all God's things, even the meanest,
and the trams that pass by, the window panes that shine,
backs hurriedly turned and lowered eyes,
the woman who perturbs you:

the world is there and seems to wait for you
to look it in the eye, for you to heed it
since it's always there but easy to forget,
to be distracted from it, to nod off...

But when evening's shadows come,
how the world calls out to you! how that sky
expands and comes upon you in its true
beauty without flaws or kinks in its reflections,
and then for your completion you change colour.

In a moment we will listen to Clare play the piano and anyone who wishes may come and light a candle – giving thanks for sky, day and night, rainbow and rain, embracing the light and the grey.

In breathing meditation, in deep breaths taken in exhilarating open spaces, in the presence of mountains and oceans, in the midst of our city of sandstone and steel, may we learn to live as sky people, in harmony and co-creation with God's intent for creation. May we be people for whom the Sacred presence of God is made known in sky and the air. And may this be a source of daily responsibility but also a source of joy.

May we learn to live in mystery.

May we learn to live by grace.

References

"Blue Skies" by Irving Berlin

"Stormy Weather" by Harold Arlen and Ted Koehler.

"All my stars" by Anne Powell, in her volume of poetry "Firesong." Steele Roberts, 1999.

"Dhinawan 'Emu' In The Sky" with Ben Flick

Through our eyes, Aboriginal cultural knowledge, past, present and future.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzFYFutiwoA>

Ali Cobby Eckerman "Kangaroo in the Sky" <https://redroomcompany.org/poem/ali-cobby-eckermann/kangaroo-sky/>

Franco Loi, "How I love the world, its air, its breath"

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<https://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/poem/item/22130/auto/0/How-I-love-the-world-the-air-its-breath>

Rachel Collis, "Golden Age" on her CD *Remains of the Day*. www.rachelcollis.com