

# “Walk gently with Earth: reflections on Job, Yahweh and Earth”

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 1 September, 2019

A Contemporary Reflection by Warren Talbot

Creation 1C – Earth Sunday

Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Luke 5: 1-11; Job 38: 1-18

This reflection can be viewed on You Tube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RELW35COMco>

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The Book of Job is one of the great examples of both Jewish and Christian poetry. Written maybe 5 to 600 years before the figure of Jesus, Job has challenged and inspired many people struggling with the real-life issue of innocent suffering. The book also has reflections about humanity and Earth, which is our focus this morning.

Job is an example of religious mythology in two main ways. First, Job is not a historical figure. Job exists as a literary creation to explore issues of meaning and purpose. Second, in my view, Yahweh is also a cultural and linguistic construct, not a supernatural being living “up there” in the heavens. Job is poetry, not astrophysics.

This morning we heard two creation accounts. The first was Ros’ telling of Genesis 1 in the children’s talk. This is the familiar Jewish poetry of creation in seven days. The second creation account was read by Hazel – from Job 38. A very different creation story. There are several other creation stories in the Scriptures, most notably in the Psalms and also in the book of Isaiah.

Having been robbed of material possessions and bodily health by Satan, with Yahweh’s explicit permission and support, Job wishes he’d never been born. He’s not the only one who’s been there.

The unknown writer then gives us 35 chapters of Job’s agonised conversations with his three friends. In chapter 38, which we heard, Yahweh appears and speaks from within a whirlwind – or a violent storm.

Yahweh does not give Job a sympathetic hearing. Rather, dripping with sarcasm, Yahweh mocks Job. Verse 4 of chapter 38 is typical. Yahweh says to Job:

*“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?*

*Tell me, since you are so well informed!”*

(Source: Eugene Peterson, The Message.)<sup>i</sup>

Yahweh would not make a very good pastoral friend! Yahweh gives Job not an answer to his innocent pain and suffering but an interrogation.

Carl Jung interprets Yahweh's speech to support Jung's view that God, and not only humans, has a dark side. God has a dark side! Jung goes on to suggest that Jesus died as a sacrifice not for our sin, but for God's sin against Job.

Let's look a bit further at Yahweh's speech as the anonymous writer presents it. The speech is an elaborate account of Yahweh extolling Earth and its non-human creatures as majestic, wild, beautiful and free. One cannot help but be captured and captivated by the poetry.

*Homo sapiens* are all but invisible in this creation account. We are not the end point, let alone the high point, of creation – for the writer. In fact, we don't rate a mention, other than in Yahweh's callous dismissal of Job's plight.

We tend to place homo sapiens at the centre of the biblical narrative and salvation history. The writer of Job does not.

The story does have a happy ending, of sorts. Job lives to be one hundred and forty! He dies wealthy but he dies without an answer to his questions. Superb and inspiring as the poetry is, Job doesn't get an answer from Yahweh - and neither do we. Neither do we.

Some commentators read in this text a rallying call for environmental action to save our planet from the perils of global warming and climate change. I strongly support the call to environmental action, but not because of the capricious actions and bitchy words of a tribal god whose name is Yahweh.

The Scriptures inspire, suggest and even provoke us, in ways which nurture us as people of faith and as a community of justice-seeking friends. But we do not find in the Scriptures a policy on climate change, a policy on coal seam gas or, for that matter, smart phone data encryption technology. It's just not there.

Our God-given challenge is to work out for ourselves faithful, caring, just and equitable responses to the many challenges of contemporary life – the pain and suffering we all face in our personal lives at some times. The social injustices and human rights violations, and the global and ecological challenges facing the planet. Our God given challenge is to work out our response – in our time – in our age

In the Pitt Street community, we are doing that. Celebrating the Season of Creation is one way in which we focus on supporting the fragile web of life on planet Earth, our common home.

We exercise our responsibility in three main ways:

First we try to be responsible in our own actions. With your support we've moved to green power, we recycle as we can, and our lighting systems are gradually using less energy. And I know many individuals are taking action in their personal or family or household lifestyles to reduce reliance on disposables, such as plastic.

Second, at Pitt St, we have ongoing education around ecology matters as a regular part of our Sunday gathering.

And third, we work with others. We are active in the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change. We support the Synod Uniting Earth team. On 20 September, we will be joining in the school climate strike. I hope to see you here on the day where we will be having a prayer service before many members of the Uniting Church will join the student Climate Strike.

Our efforts will never be sufficient, let alone perfect. Through human greed and selfish disregard, we may end up destroying life on this planet. We are already well on the way.

But there is hope, when in determined and sustained community action, we work and pray for change, together. I believe that the symbols of bread and wine, which we will share in a few moments, are symbols of hope. They speak to us of Planet Earth. They speak to us of human labour. They speak to us of the compassion we see expressed in the figure of Jesus, Jesus' friends, and the lakes and rivers where Jesus lived and worked.

These symbols of hope remind us that in the beginning was creative love and compassion. Creative love was with God - and creative love was God.

Our faith involves a call to creative love for all human beings, compassion for all creatures of Earth, and creative love for Earth herself.

Together, let us make it so.

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Gordon D. Kaufman, *In the beginning...Creativity*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

Eugene Peterson, *The Message*. Passages available at: <https://www.biblegateway.com/>

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1 Please note: The Uniting Church in Australia recommends the *New Revised Standard Version* for the study of the Scriptures. That translation should be consulted for further study of the text.