

# The Season of Creation

Glenbrook Uniting Church and Pitt Street Uniting Church, 13 September, 2020

Contemporary Reflections by Peter Berry and Judy Johnson

Season of Creation 2

Psalm 19:1-6; Psalm 36:5-9; Genesis 2

This reflection can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

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## GOD IN CREATION by Peter Berry

Since I retired from the workforce I have tried to retain a little bit of routine in my life and one thing I like to do each Monday morning, first thing, is to walk into the bush near my place.

I come to a precipice, facing west towards the upper Blue Mountains and I stop there and I contemplate and I pray and say a few words, reflecting on the week just gone and the week yet to come.

I look out and soak in the view of the rugged mountain ranges, their deep gorges and pockets of cloud and mist; and I am often struck with the thought that this looks probably the same as it did a hundred or even a thousand years ago.

I think of the European explorers who would have stood here and thought: *how the heck do we get across.*

I think also of the Dharug people who would have stood here too – and said: *we know how to get across!* I think about how those people, those Dharug people, lived in harmony with the environment, not trying to defeat it but living with an enduring spiritual connection to the land on which they walked.

I always feel in awe of this place – the majesty of the landscape and the whole mystery and wonder of creation and the amazing realisation that somehow, little old insignificant, irrelevant me is part of it all!

Yes you can see a few human structures poking through the bush and this always reminds me of the intertwining nature of our relationship with God – both divine creation and human existence!

I can feel incredibly close to God here! It is always quiet. The view seems endless. I see the colour of the wildflowers along the bush track as I walk in, I see the shapes of the jutting sandstone beside and beneath me. I hear and feel the gentle whispers of the breeze and the calls of the black cockatoos - and somehow I feel in the presence of a deep and enduring mystery.

When we talk about God, I think we have all been shaped to a great degree by the images taught from our childhood, of God seemingly being an old bloke up there somewhere, dressed in white, with a flowing silver beard sitting on a golden throne. Some cynics even describe God as a “Sky Daddy.”

Even the words of the Psalms sometimes use images like that – a benevolent Father up there somewhere watching over the earthlings below. They are such inadequate and restrictive depictions of God, for we just don’t have the words in our language to describe God. For God is much, much more than a detached person somewhere out of our realm. God is a presence! A presence and a reality that threads through all aspects of our lives.

Perhaps our indigenous people got closer to the mark by seeing themselves as part of a Dreamtime story where the very land on which they trod was inseparable from the spiritual world.

I see God as being much more than some sort of heavenly being. To me, God is the glory of the sunrise, the cooling movement of the southerly buster and the rumble of the distant thunder. God is the drooping of the golden wattle, the sun-baking of the blue-tongue lizard and the mimicry of the lyre bird.

God is creation in all its splendour!

Yes, of course, we also see God through the life of Jesus, but creation gives us some sort of special insight.

We often use terms like “Mother Nature” to describe the changing of the seasons and the germination of the seeds and the times of flowering and the instinctive building of a nest by the birds. And we all know what it means and accept it without question. I think “Mother Nature” is a pretty good updated version of God!

One of our former ministers at St Andrew’s Glenbrook (and I always say that every minister leaves something of themselves after they move on!) That Minister was Neil Smith. Neil once gave an insight about God that I have never forgotten. He said that we only ever get glimpses of God and we never ever really see the whole picture.

The glimpses we get are part of a much bigger and complete whole that all our lives we want to see but are never able to. Our faith emboldens us to believe that someday we will get to see the full picture of God in a dimension so different from the human space in which we live now. But for the present we must survive on glimpses!

Imagine just seeing the right hand bottom corner of the painting of the Mona Lisa and expecting to appreciate the wonder of it all! Or imagine looking at a map of Australia that began at Sydney and ended at Katoomba! Or trying to get your head around the Bible and stopping at the second chapter of Genesis! You would only get a glimpse of something much, much more extensive. There would be so much more wonder yet to be revealed.

I think we can view God in that same light. The glimpses we catch are wonderful! But there is so much more to come!

Creation is part of the mysterious story of God.

Together let us keep looking for more glimpses of God in this wonderful world of Creation!

## SMELLING THE ROSES by Judy Johnson

I think that I was born questioning. If you ask my mother, or if you could ask my mother, she would have said I was born talking and questioning. And I think that that was a good thing.

But churches, when I was a kid, that wasn't a good thing. They didn't like questions. You just had to believe what they said and I struggled with that. I struggled with a lot of the things that they said, particularly when it came to creation and God and the wonder of the world.

And I got to a point where, I think I was about 12, where I could very easily have just gone a completely different track because I was very open to spiritual things. I believed in "other", but I struggled with church.

And I came home from school and I saw a yellow rose growing. And I stopped. And I literally smelled the roses and I started to question and wonder, because it was so beautiful. I couldn't work out why it was so soft. The petals were so soft and the thorns were so sharp. And I knew the biology and the science behind why it was like that and as I'm looking at it I understood that there was a creator who made things beautiful and I didn't have to have everything answered because that, at that point, was enough.

So in that instance, that's when I started to understand that creation was incredibly precious. And that if I was to love God, then I was also to love God's creation. And that made sense to me. I didn't have any great theological understanding of it, but that was enough.

But over time I met all these people - and they were people in the church, a bit like the people that Miriam was talking about last week, with the idea of domination. And that's what they said. We were to dominate and we could control - and so it didn't matter what we did.

And I wasn't comfortable with that at all. But I didn't know any other explanation. But in my own way, I've tried to not do that. I've tried to care for God's creation; and Mark and I, we've created our system here. We're trying very hard with aquaponics and we have our ducks and so we're trying to live in a way that's different and leaving less of a footprint.

But I didn't have any understanding, still, why? Until I met, actually, a young bible teacher that some of you might know called Matt Anslow. We went to his house for a weekend and it was a coming back to earth retreat where like-minded people got together to try and sort out what it meant to live a life of faith in relationship with creation, and how you did that.

On that weekend I learned that dominion and dominate, that was the wrong way to understand that word. It was about being - it was about mastery, but not mastery as in "lording it over" but mastery as in a "master craftsman", where a woodworker would, like, get a piece of beautiful wood and add to it and go with the grain and not chop it up for firewood.

So, there's that element of mastery not dominion. and in Genesis 2, where it says we were to work the land, a better understanding of that is to work with the land, and work for the land. So it's an idea of servanthood.

So that gave me the understanding, the framework of why I was already doing what I was doing - which to me was just very cool. So I can have conversations with people now about what the bible really says about looking after creation. So I live it out in my life as best I can here.

But I've been incredibly blessed, in that I get to work it every day, because I work in a public school. But it's a school for special purposes, so kids with trauma backgrounds and a lot of needs. So I'm living out loving creation by loving them.

But I also teach sustainable lifestyle. That's what I do every day. So I get to make soap and I get to garden. And I get to create things with these young people that show them a different way to live. And it's just amazing watching them sort of touch the plants and smell the flowers.

And we've made frog ponds. We're making a native habitat. And they're looking at the tadpoles and they're waiting for the tadpoles that have just magically turned up as far as they're concerned because that's what frogs do. And they're just going: *but won't they run away.* And I go: *no, because this is where they're meant to live and they know that and so they're happy here.*

So we have all these things happening at school, so every day I get to to live my faith and share that with these young people. They know that I'm a Christian. I don't talk about God to them, because it's in a public school system, so that's not appropriate for the circumstance. But I get to show them.

Just two weeks ago I found out, maybe three weeks, ago I found out the most remarkable thing, which is incredible for these young people, that in the soil is a bacterium - and it's nature's Prozac.

It's an antidepressant bacterium which is just remarkable. That's why gardeners are so happy but isn't that incredible. That's the grace of God. So God has actually put the bacterium in the soil, even though the consequences of our rebellion was that we would have to toil in the soil to get anything to grow. So they're the consequences, that, in the middle of all that consequence God has put this thing to make us happy.

So the kids - and I told them about that - I say like, yeah, this is stuff in the soil. If you come out here and you touch it, it's actually good for you. We played mud pies the other day making a garden. Teenagers! It was a bit messy and it was wonderful and we made mud balls and they're there.

See, my hope for that is that one day, what's gonna happen is they're gonna pause and they're gonna smell the roses, just like I did. And in that moment, they will also understand that the creator is there and present and loves them.

So I've got this incredibly blessed life where I can actually live out my faith. And God's done that. He's put all this into place for me and I think that's a challenge for all of us.

We've got to work out a way that we can live our lives differently. In a way that is right with the environment.

We're going to be able to change the conversations, and show other people around us that there are other and better ways to live and honour the creation.

And I think, as we honour the creation and the creator, they will also come to meet the creator.

So that's what we do.