



# SUSTAINABLE SEPTEMBER 2021

## Earth, Sea & Sky

### The Skies of the Earth

*A Service for Sustainable September – 19 September 2021*

#### INTRODUCTION

*(If you have a data projector, project a picture of the sky up on the screen/wall. Alternatively, you may want to stick cut-outs of sun, moon and stars on the walls around your worship space)*

The atmosphere and the sky we see surround us, cradles us, sustains us and can be a source of wonder.

We take for granted that there should be clean air to breath.

We marvel in the blaze of stars in a night sky away from city lights.

As we worship God today we embrace our wonder for the skies.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FIRST PEOPLES

We gather in acknowledgement of the (.....) Peoples, the first inhabitants of this place, who dwelt here and cared for the land of old.

***We gather attentive to their wonder and stories of sun, moon and stars,***

***And we come in commitment to the ongoing journey of reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.***

#### CALL TO WORSHIP

Through sun and shadow,

***God's love will remain.***

Through torrent and thunder,

***God's love will remain.***

Through fog and flurries,

***God's love will remain.***

Through breeze and bluster,

***God's love will remain.***

Through cloudless and clear,

***God's love will remain.***

Through rain and rainbow,

***God's love will remain.***

Through all that life brings,

***God's love will remain.***

Come, let us worship God.

#### SONG

**Together in Song** 188 'Where wide skies roll down'

**Together in Song** 186 'Stars and planets flung in orbit'

#### PRAYER

Holy One,  
you cradle each of us with remarkable hope.  
You wrap each of us in a deep, mysterious love.  
You wipe each tear away with infinite gentleness.  
You celebrate each of us for the one-of-a-kind beauty we each possess.  
May we now celebrate these blessings with open spirits and grateful hearts.

**Amen**

### **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

*Based on Jeremiah 4:23–28*

*Recruit two readers for the prayer of confession and words of affirmation.*

One: Jeremiah was a prophet who lived a long time ago.  
Jeremiah, what do you see?

Jeremiah: I see lands made barren and dry,  
I see the heavens made dark.

One: Jeremiah, why do you see this?

Jeremiah: God's people have forgotten who they are.

One: Jeremiah, what do you see?

Jeremiah: I see mountains quaking,  
I see empty skies with no birds anywhere,  
I see ruins where there once were cities.

One: Jeremiah, why do you see this?

Jeremiah: God's people have forgotten who they are,  
And now it is time for them to remember.

One: Jeremiah reminded people long ago of what they had forgotten. Jeremiah's words remind us of what we forget.

***When lands turn barren,  
when skies are empty of wings,  
when cities become ruins:  
we have forgotten that we are God's people.  
(silence for reflection)***

One: Many years after Jeremiah, Paul – a follower of Jesus  
– tried to help people remember.

Paul, what are you writing?

Paul: A letter to God's people.

One: Paul, what do you say to them?

Paul: I tell them to hold fast to God's word of life,  
that they might shine like bright stars in the sky.

***We will hold fast to God's word of life.  
We will remember that we are God's people.***

One: And may we each shine like a bright star in the sky.





**READINGS** James 3:13 – 4:8  
Mark 9: 30-39

**REFLECTION**

**SONG** **Together in Song** 651 'Take, take off your shoes'  
**Together in Song** 672 'Lord of earth and all creation'

**OFFERING**

Gracious God,  
we thank you for your many gifts to us:  
the unfolding of day and night;  
the smell of a meal being prepared;  
the voice of a friend greeting us;  
the feel of a cool breeze against our cheeks.  
These, and so many more, fill our days.  
We now offer these gifts in response  
as a sign of our gratitude  
and a gesture of our love. Amen

**PRAYERS FOR OTHERS**

Creator God, we lament the destruction of earth and sky.  
We pray for all of the people and places that suffer during  
the climate crisis;  
for communities where the air is unbreathable;  
for neighbourhoods filled with the smoke and ash of wildfires;  
for people who live with climate-induced despair or depression.

Creator God, show us how to step back and allow Creation to flourish;  
how to reduce our carbon footprint;  
how to care for Earth and sky and all creatures therein;  
how to use our voices to advocate for climate action.

We continue to look to the sky, the movement of the sun, clouds, moon, and stars.

We acknowledge the mystery around us.

Receive all our prayers this day.

Hear our concerns and our dreams;

hear our deep desire to reflect your love to you, to each other, and all of creation.

**Amen.**

**SONG** **Together in Song** 689 'Lord, hear my praying'  
**Together in Song** 690 'Beauty for brokenness'

**BLESSING**

Grace to you and peace.

May the rain of kindness fall upon you.

May each cloud spark your imagination.

May the stars' light give you strength.

May the bright blue sky bring you peace.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord  
**In the name of Christ**  
**Amen**

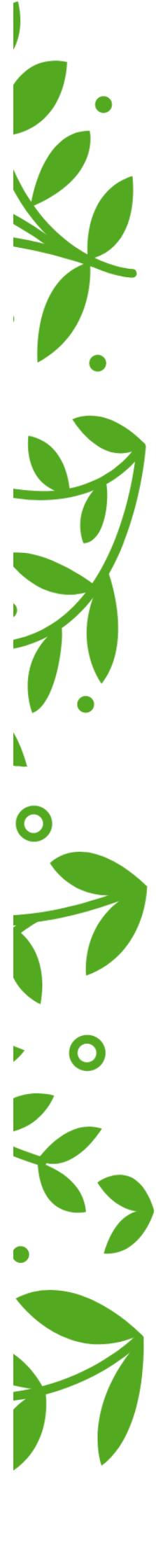
**BLESSING SONG**

*For you, deep stillness of the silent inland;  
for you, deep blue of the desert skies;  
for you, flame red of the rocks and stones;  
for you, sweet water from hidden springs.  
From the edges seek the heartlands,  
and when you're burnt by the journey  
may the cool winds of the hovering Spirit  
soothe and replenish you.  
In the name of Christ.  
In the name of Christ.*

*Julie Perrin and Robin Mann*

*Prayers have been adapted from the Fusion Resources 'Seasons of Creation, Pentecost 2,  
2021' – Sky Sunday.*





## 'I want!'

**James 3:13 – 4:8**

***Sustainable September Reflection Week 3 - 19 September 2021***

***Rev Gordon Scantlebury***

James writes encouraging people to wisdom, but as you read between the lines, you begin to wonder that this church community wasn't particularly functional. In fact, it sounds like they were tearing themselves apart!

There was infighting, anger, disputes and conflicts. People were giving priority to the rich over the poor. There were pretences and selfishness, and people twisting the truth to suit their own ends – 'fake news' everywhere.

This was certainly **not** the type of community Christ had called them to. They had lost their bearings, and so James seeks to address what was happening. And the key understanding James hits on, the truth he really puts his finger on is that ***these problems all started from within.***

"Where do all these conflicts and disputes come from?" asks James. – They come from your own cravings within. They come from your own selfishness, envy and greed; - all these things you don't want to own up to!

For don't you see, it's not good enough to just say 'the situation was bad and so I reacted badly.' But, **why** did you react that way? "The times are challenging. The world is a complex place." Yes, but what is your part in that complexity? And don't keep pointing your finger at everyone else and saying, "it's all their fault." But what is happening within you? What is the part you are playing?

It can often be the most difficult task we have in life – to reflect on who we really are, **how** we really are: to realise what input **we** may have – particularly in a problem that we've caused, or in a relationship breakdown. It is the task of standing still long enough to be honest with ourselves.

Now, James is speaking here about our human relationships of course, and of how these impact on the community of which we are a part of. And there may be a message we need to hear in our own lives in that - our relationships, our families, our church.

But today I want to focus also on our relationship with the wider environment. Let us take these insights of James to challenge not simply our human relationships between one another, but also our relationship with the earth and its creatures. For we can see the same sorts of dysfunctionality: our greed, selfishness, falsehood, lack of respect in the

way we treat not just each other, but the earth itself. What are the problems we see between ourselves and our natural environment? What is the part you or I play in these? In the language of James, “What are the inner cravings that war within us’?”

For we are all aware there are problems, - even crises with our world environment at this point in our history. Any one of us could spell out a whole litany of woes:

- temperature rise and climate change;
- more intense cyclones
- sea level rise and acidification of the oceans
- land degradation and environment destruction
- animal extinctions
- urban sprawl
- air pollution
- salt encroachment
- resultant environmental refugees and economic turmoil;

and we could go on!

And in the face of all this disruption and upheaval, many people simply disown the problem, or distance themselves from it. “It’s all natural change. We’re not responsible.” Or, you know, “it’s just the complex world we live in. It’s our huge population. What can anyone do?” For the most part, our inclination is to keep the problem as something ‘out there’ – something we have no control over, and something that has nothing much to do with me directly.

And then, if we’re not disowning the problem and burying our heads in the sand, we readily point the finger and seek to blame someone else. “It must be their fault!” It’s the mining companies that are at fault, or big business. It’s our government not taking things seriously enough. It’s the Japanese hunting the whales, or traditional Chinese medicine killing rhinos for their horns. It’s the Russians draining the Aral Sea to irrigate cotton crops. It’s Malaysians clearing rainforest in Sarawak for oil palms. It’s Adani drilling the aquifers and dredging the reef.”

It’s always someone else, or somewhere else, - and the problem only gets worse.

But let us stop and instead take the perspective James offers us. Perhaps the source of the problem lies not so much ‘out there’, but rather lies within.

- For, I am the one who wants a comfortable temperature in my home, so I turn on the heater or the air-conditioner, (even though previous generations didn’t need those things anywhere near the extent we do) - and somewhere coal has to be burnt to make me comfortable.



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- I want my Hungry Jack Whopper, and a nice plump roast chook from Woolies, and maybe a T-bone tonight and lamb sate tomorrow. So much meat on the menu! – and somewhere in Brazil a bit more rainforest is cleared for cattle ranching, or in the Southern Ocean krill is harvested for chicken feed, and more and more methane is added to the green house gases.
  - I want to change my wardrobe to more fashionable clothes. I want all the latest technology, and to update my car every 3 years. I can't do without disposable nappies for my babies, and the convenience of bottled water (I mean, who drinks out of the tap anymore?), and I want all my fresh food individually packaged in foam trays wrapped in plastic (or at least, that's what Woolies and Coles tell me).
  - I want my cheap holidays in Bali. I want the novelty of fresh cherries in the middle of winter, or grapes available throughout the year, even though they have to be flown in from the other side of the world.

I want. ***I want!!*** We have become a society of 'I want'

For don't you see, the **source** of the problem is not something 'out there.' The problem is '**in here**'. It's not the multi-nationals who are to blame. They are just doing what we want! Much more uncomfortably though, it is me, and you, and all of us combined in our modern culture: - our individualistic, self-centred, selfish, materialistic society that consumes as if there was no one else to worry about, and wastes as if there was no tomorrow; - a culture that only seems to care about self. That is where the earth's destruction begins.

Just like that early church community James wrote to, ***we have lost our bearings***. We have made ourselves the centres of our own universes. We have let our envy and selfish ambition, our cravings, our coyness, our personal pleasures be the driving forces of our lives. We live in a world where the rich scramble over the poor in a race to the bottom. We have lost our way.

But James points us in a different direction. Indeed, so does Jesus. 'Submit yourselves therefore to God', writes James. 'Let God work his will in you.' Let God be your centre, your focus. "Seek first the Kingdom of God", Jesus tells us. Let God be the basis and the centre and the direction of your life.

For when God is at the centre, I come to know that I am loved and worthwhile and valued, and so I don't **need** to appease all my cravings and envy and greed like some self-centred child.

When God is the centre, I can begin to see the difference between what I **want** - and what I actually **need**. I can live more simply, but also more freely.

And when God is at the centre, I can see myself clearly as part of a much bigger community - God's community – which **includes** the earth and all its creatures. Not me on top with all my desires first, but me belonging as part of the whole, living a life of integrity and compassion, and bearing much fruit.

You know, we can turn off our lights and recycle our glass bottles. We can plant trees and sign petitions and campaign for the rights of others. **And they are all important and very worthwhile things to do.**

But the most **vital** thing we can do is to look honestly at ourselves, at our own desires and lifestyles. The one thing you have the most power to change in this world is yourself: to trust in God and to let God be the centre of your being. For it is then, as Christ's disciples that we may become agents for change in our world, and beacons of hope and compassion for all God's creation.

Let's take a look at ourselves.

Amen.

## On greatness and children

Reflection on Mk 9:30-39

***Sustainable September Reflection Week 3 - 19 September 2021***

***Rev Sophia Lizares***

Throughout history, greatness has been associated with the power of kings. Placed by a divinity at the top of a hierarchy, feudal lords exercised power over slaves, serfs and other subjects. Women and children were viewed as property as were the earth and its produce.

Although Australia no longer is a feudal society, this form of power persists in many unequal relationships between humans that violate their dignity. It lives on in our dependence on extractive industries such as mining and the logging of native forests and enabled by government reluctance to provide incentives for the production of renewables.

Our Gospel reading invites us to consider the different kind of greatness that Jesus models for us. The apostles had been arguing with one another who was the greatest. Jesus said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Then he took a little child and put her among them; and taking her in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."





Frustrated and threatened by the inaction of adults, Greta Thunberg and other children put themselves at the centre of a worldwide movement to demand climate action. Blessed are the meek, we say, for they shall inherit the earth. But the children don't want this anymore. We don't want the earth you've trashed. They speak from positions of vulnerability, their directness and simplicity gaining attention from state and church leaders.

Let this Season of Creation, inspire us to work across the generations to be stewards of God's world, healing and blessing the earth not only for today but for the children and for all other creatures yet to come.

By making space in the circle for the children and for all creatures that require our care, we welcome not only Jesus but also the One who sent him. We welcome new ways of living and relating. We welcome God's reign of inclusion, healing and renewal.