

The First Harvest

Genesis 1

My grandson Harry is 4. He loves Thomas the tank engine. He watches the videos connected to Thomas. One of his favourites is when Thomas travels the world and visits other countries, Harry is fascinated with this. Just the other day he said to his mum, "I'm going to see the world and I want you to come." Kirsty, my daughter said, "Where do you want to go?", "Well, Russia, China and Portavadie". Well, said his mum, "let's start with Portavadie, and we can see how we get on from there!"

Isn't there something wonderful in seeing the world through the eyes of a child, observing their fascination and creativity. What if we could see the world again through the eyes of Harry?

Genesis chapter 1 is a snapshot of Creation, The writer of Genesis wants us to know that this is an amazing world that God has created and that we have a role to play in it. He points out that we are the stewards of this beautiful world and God entrusts it to us.

This is the season of Harvest. We don't need to go far to look out and see the magnificent fields which have all been harvested. We see such vivid colours. When we look closer we see the red berries and all the fruits and within the church today, we have visual reminders, through the beautiful floral display and the sunflowers beside me and the sheaves of wheat.

Nature declares that this is the season of Harvest. A season that was incredibly important to the people of the Bible – after all, if there was no harvest, there would be no food and then they would literally starve.

In our generation, when we go into our supermarkets, we have a harvest of food all year round. But it is good for our souls, to take time to say thank you to God, for our food and for the blessings that we have daily.

Harvest is a season when we turn to God and thank him for being our Creator.

The Bible begins here.

God is Creator

The opening words of the Bible could not be plainer, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". The words heaven and earth are used because the Hebrew language has no single word to describe the universe, what this in fact is saying, is that God has created everything.

Galaxies, solar systems, all things from the furthest reaches of our outer space to the smallest grain of sand or bacterial microbe on planet earth. This includes every form of life, from whales to elephants, from eagles to slugs. God creates!

It includes all the laws of the universe, energy and matter, the speed of light, nuclear structure and all the laws by which nature operates.

If Harry's little mind could comprehend this, if Thomas the Tank engine took him on a tour of the universe, I'm sure he would be saying to his mum, let's go here and explore!

We live in a spectacular world. David Attenborough's nature programmes are so important because they remind people of the incredible beauty and ingenuity in our world. He has written a book, simply entitled, "The greatest show on earth", yes, to us Christians – it's the greatest show because it's God's creation.

Nehemiah the prophet wrote inspiring words, 2500 years ago, "You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is in it, the seas and all that is in them."

And ever since, men and women, boys and girls have been saying the same thing.

In the clearest possible way, the Bible tells us that there was a beginning to this planet and the clock began to tick when God said, *let there be....* Time began with creation. God existed even before time.

God has designed and made everything. He is like an artist painting a picture – such fine detail in each object. Its almost as if God as a master artist, signed his name in creation for all to see.

The Bible doesn't try to prove the existence of God, God is.... and that's enough. The Bible teaches us to praise the Creator.

"You are worthy, our Lord and God,

To receive glory and honour and power,

For you created all things

And by your will they were created."

CS Lewis once wrote, "No philosophical theory which I have yet come across is a radical improvement on the words of Genesis, that 'In the beginning God made heaven and earth'".

Friends – we pause now and we praise our Lord for making this universe. Let us sing together – *"O Lord our God...v1,2.*

Our Responsibility

So where do we, human beings, fit into this picture of God? We, who were created on the sixth day of Creation? Who are we that God should be mindful writes the psalmist? Who are we, in the eyes of God?

Well God gives us an incredible exalted position. He gives us power over the animals and the birds. We have been given responsibility to “work on this planet and to take care of it”. We have been given the awesome responsibility of respecting and subduing nature, so as to shape it in a direction that will reflect the beauty, order and glory of our Creator.

We were therefore created for a purpose. You and Me!

This is no mean task but a responsibility and trust placed upon all human beings – first and foremost to be people who take our moral responsibility seriously and who care for God's creation. This is God's first instruction to human beings.

Why has God entrusted this to us?

Because the Bible tells us that we are made in His image.

“So God created man in His own image,

In the image of God he created him;

Male and female he created them.”

Three times the writer of the creation story emphasises the important and vital relationship between God and humans.

Repeating the word 'created' three times, is like exclamation marks in each sentence. It's a kind of Wow, wow, wow moment.

The kind of moment that would make Harry say to his mum, “WOW! Isn't that wonderful!”

What does it mean to be created in God's image?

Well, the Bible doesn't really spell this out clearly. But, very simply, it could be that God has created humans to relate to Him in such a way that none of the other created beings can.

We are rational...well sometimes...we can love...well sometimes...we have deep emotions...we have a concept of good and bad...we have a conscience....perhaps all these things are what it means to be made in His image.

But what it does tell us is that we have an exalted position and that we shouldn't spoil this relationship in any way. We shouldn't mar the image of God within us.

One theologian has written “to be made in God's image or likeness means to have personality, to have powers of thought, feeling and will which go far beyond the brute instincts of purely animal life. Being created in the image of God distinguishes us from all other life forms.” We have the unique capacity to relate to God and to choose to worship Him or not.

So here we have the second reason why Harvest is vitally important because we are made in the image of God and he has entrusted to us the responsibility of looking after His creation and to do it in a way that honours and brings glory to His name. We all have a part to play in this.

Thirdly, where it went wrong.

God saw all that He had made and it was good. It was very good, he was pleased. He was pleased with his creation. It was perfect but there was a fly in the ointment. God created us in his image and He created us as morally responsible people able to exercise free will – in other words, we are not robots!

So, all was well until the fly in the ointment contaminated the ointment. At a specific moment in history, man chose for the first time to disbelieve God's Word and disobey his directions, and at that moment the Bible tells us that sin entered the world.

We don't have to look to far to see this today.

There are vast areas of the world uninhabited through nuclear or toxic chemical waste. God will say, *this is not good!*

The delicate balance of natural forces is disturbed by human carelessness. This is not good!

Human greed and war scar countries and destroy God's creation - that's not good!

COP 26, shouldn't need to happen, and yet this emergency global meeting is coming to our door step in order to address these issues. COP 26 tells us that something is wrong.

The warning bells have been sounding for generations, and now the alarm has gone off and God's Creation, this beautiful planet, a world that Harry wants to travel when he is older, may not be, we are told.

God's warning has sounded from day one, to all human kind, if you disobey my word, you will die. Death here means separation. You will be separated from me. At the moment of our disobedience, our spiritual relationship with God was

severed. Instead of delighting in God and his Creation, humans began to hide from Him.

Alienated, ashamed and afraid, they were now living in a state of spiritual death. Paradise had been lost.

Of course, death was not part of God's original plan. His plan was for us to be fruitful and multiply, and enjoy his Creation, but death and decay became the ways of the world.

Is this the end of the story?

Far from it!

God did not give up on us!

On the contrary, He came to us! To help us sort out this mess!

He came to save us and to bring us back to Paradise.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "as In Adam all die" but that's not the end of the statement, he goes on to say, "as in Christ, all will be brought to life, Christ the first fruits, and afterwards those who belong to Christ." God's great plan for this world and universe continues despite us.

Today we have magnificent sunflowers here on the table with me, and thanks to Billy and Jan for growing them in their garden and for letting us see their beauty.

The French word for sunflower is *tournesol*, which translates literally to "turned sun," referring to the plant's ability to turn itself to face the sun.

The sunflower has much to teach us. Because we can also turn to the source of life and learn from the source. That source is Jesus who is literally our sunshine.

John's Gospel begins – "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" and it goes on to describe Jesus as the Word become flesh. The Greek word for Word is *logos* which means the source of life.

So, when we look to Christ, we take on his light and his love and this gives us strength to do his will and to continue his call to look after Creation and all that God has created and to be wise stewards of it all.

My hope and prayer is that future generations of boys and girls like young Harry will be able to open their eyes and see the magnificence of this world and to enjoy their life on this planet. But it looks like that will depend on me and you and this generation now.