

God's Presence In Creation (Harvest)

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[0 : 00] Morning everyone. There was this family and they'd had invited the vicar around for lunch. And not being a family used to giving thanks, they thought this event was worthy of briefing their children pretty well before the vicar came. And so they had a quick practice of what was appropriate to say as a grace. So the vicar, Julie, arrived for dinner and they sat down at the table and there was a pause. And dad said to the middle child, would you like to say what we said earlier?

Upon there was a pause. And the mum said, it's what we said earlier in the kitchen. And the child sparked into life and said, oh God, that boring vicar is coming tonight. I hope he doesn't stay too long.

When was the last time we paused to embrace the presence of God and give thanks? You know, in order for his creation. Or do we view his creation purely through our consumerist eyes?

That it's just all for us. You know, have we seemingly expected God to provide everything without giving him thanks and the glory that he rightly deserves?

And also stewarding well what we've been given. You know, do you remember the day maybe there were no toilet rolls on the shelves? Do you remember that day?

[1 : 53] Maybe did the world end for you that day? Maybe you'd just like to share with the person next to you what your alternative arrangements? No, don't do that.

But on this Harvest Sunday, we have to give thanks to God for the abundance of what he's given us and how we use that and how we share that.

And how we see and glorify the presence of God in creation itself. What a wonderful world. I mean, Sir David Attenborough has brought us and to the world pictures and images that we would never normally see.

Of a world that is so awesome and so beautiful. And no wonder he gets so passionate about the damage that we're doing to the planet.

Maybe we need to see and embrace the wholeness of the presence of God in creation to actually stir us into actually action about doing things.

[3 : 02] But the question I want to ask in this wonderful yet broken world, is this all for us? After all, it provides me with food.

It gives me water. It gives me long, hot summer days. Eat for crops, birds, animals, bugs, rainbows. We can all make the list. All those lovely harvest hymns.

We plow the fields and scatter. We think that God created all this just for us. It seems to me that creation praises God in itself by simply being his creation in its incredible and beautiful diversity and variety.

And since most of creation is beyond the awareness of humankind, and it is, you know, in search of space, the heights of the mountains, the depths of the sea.

It wasn't created merely to serve the purposes that have to do with us. I think it was created for the enjoyment of God, who created it for himself.

[4 : 17] Who else would do that? This is my world. God, this is what I've created in all its beauty for us to share. That's why it should be precious to us.

He saw what he had made, and he said it was good. And we get to join in, as the psalmist has told us this morning, and see his presence in creation.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have set in place, I don't know whether you've ever gone to one of those places where there is no ambient light around, and you have laid down, and you have looked at the canopy of stars, and the beauty.

And that wonderful verse, I think, in that hymn that he says, and he flung stars into space. And suddenly the enormity and beauty of the things maybe that we don't even comprehend suddenly

comes into focus.

The beauty of things that we're discovering at the depths of the sea, parts of the sea that have never, ever been explored yet, but things that are yet to be discovered. The wonder of God, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars.

[5 : 38] I heard of a theological professor who made fun of those who talked of finding God in nature. He accused them of being pantheists who mistook beauty for divinity.

And at his worst, he suggested that we only engaged in touchy-feely religion that had nothing to do with the Christian story. I disagree. I totally disagree.

Now, I know from years of leading on Alpha and in various settings, and you would know, that to stand at our glorious seafront here and watch that beautiful sunset, as so many people do, and you stand there and people gather in awe and wonder.

But like many here, I guess in doing that, we are making some kind of faith statement, whether we are a Christian or not, but we capture the awesomeness of creation and what God can do.

You know, even a non-believer's awe is some form of religious affirmation, because how else can you explain this amazing, beautiful creation that God has given you?

[6 : 50] Maybe God created this foremostly because he is God and we are not, and we need to remember that. And the graciousness of God, I always think, is that we get to join in.

We get to partner with God in this amazing creation as stewards to look after. No wonder our young people are so passionate about this at the moment.

You know, talk to young people, and it is true at the moment in school. One of the main things that they want to talk about is the environment and how we work with the planet.

And they believe, many, that because of our age group that we're not interested. We are, and we should be, and we need to listen more and be active.

What is mankind that you are mindful of them? Mere human beings that you care for them. He made them rulers over the work of your hands. You put everything under their feet.

[7 : 50] We have a responsibility. It's been given to us, and we are responsible to be good stewards. Remember the workers, that story of the workers in the vineyard?

You know, oh, well, you know, we'll do it our own way. We'll do it our own way. And when the sun comes, oh, we'll get rid of that, because no.

We are responsible, and we get to play our part in creation. And dare I say it, we are accountable. It is that word, that we are accountable to God, each and every one of us, and certainly for us as a church nationally.

You know, and often we show off, don't we? Look at what we can do. Oh, you know, it's so small compared with what he does. God doesn't need to show off.

It's just his character to create wonder. Wonder after wonder after wonder. And if I delight in what I've created, surely I want to share it and share what he does.

[8 : 58] And as followers, we are called to cherish it too. Now, there's a word that's gone out of fashion, isn't it? Cherish. Isn't that a shame?

You have even taken out the marriage service. What a shame. Maybe we'll put it back in. But cherish. We need to cherish that which has been given.

Cherish his presence in creating something that means so much to him, that means so much to us as well. Maybe like Mandy and I, in the depths of your loft, you have a box, if you're a parent or grandparent.

And it's filled with those things that your children brought home from school or your grandchildren brought home from school for you. Maybe it was a toilet roll with a doily for wings and a small halo that looked better on the top of your tree than any designer thing because they had made it and they had created it for you.

Maybe it was that piece of Fimo that they brought home that really was supposed to look like a dog, but it was so special because they made it for you.

[10 : 22] Maybe two. Again, there was that thing that, that picture that they brought home, two circles with two legs coming out for sticks.

It didn't look anything like me. But it was. It was. And it was made specifically for me. But we treasure it.

We don't throw it away. We keep it and we treasure it. And we open the basket now and again to remember how much we are loved and how much we are known because somebody created that

for me.

We sat there. We hugged our child. We held them close. And we said, this is so beautiful. Thank you for creating it for me.

Flip the coin. When did we last pause and focus on God in the love of his creation that we were given to share with him and others and sense the awesomeness of his presence and said, thank you, God.

[11 : 31] Thank you for this moment. Thank you for this creation. Thank you for the things around me. You know, it's that throwaway line, isn't it?

The moon and the stars he made also. How majestic is your name in all the world. We're doing a prayer thing at the moment with our young people.

And it's great. Pete Gregg, 24-7 prayer, if you've ever heard of him, tells this great story that he's walking to work one day. And he just gets to the point where he feels the Lord say, hang on, Pete, just pause.

I want you to look at this tree. So he pauses and looks at the tree. Of course, people are passing by thinking, where's that man staring at a tree?

And he's thinking, okay, Lord, I know you want to say something to me through this. Well, you know, what's the message? What's the message? And he just sensed, after a few minutes of standing there, the Lord saying, that's a great tree, isn't it?

[12 : 41] I don't know whether you've been at that point of taking your children to school and that sense of wandering along on the way, and especially in the autumn with those wonderful cobwebs that are actually covered and look so beautiful in the morning dew.

And you know you're going to be late for school, don't you? Because your child just wants to stand and drink in the beauty of the thing that we're going to pass by and take in.

That is the presence of God in creation. And maybe we need to grasp it more. In Nehemiah, it says, you alone are the Lord, you have made the heavens, the heavens of heavens with all their host, the earth and all is in it.

This morning we sang, our God is a great big God, at fact. You might have heard it if you'd arrived early. And it is so true. We won't sing it now.

But it would be so appropriate that our God is a great big God and he holds us in his hand. He's higher than a skyscraper, he's deeper than a submarine. He's wider than the universe, but he's beyond my wildest dreams.

[14 : 01] You know, maybe we've lost the perspective at Harvest that it's all about tractors. Now, I love tractors. Don't get me wrong.

I think it's very romantic, that idea that we have at Harvest sometimes, of, you know, the old-fashioned haywain coming in. The evening, the sun is setting.

The workers are coming home for their ployman's lunch or in the evening and a pint of cider. You know, very romantic in the fading light of the sunlight.

But there's so much more. So much more to thanking him for the many, many causes that are coming out in this world.

A world that seeks to pollute, a world that seeks to scour, a world that seeks to destroy, willfully disregard nature and the ecosystem that is so beautiful but so delicately balanced.

[15 : 06] I am beautiful in my creation. I sensed that word this morning. I am beautiful in my creation and it's not too late.

I am beautiful in my creation, says the Lord, and I am not, and it's not too late. Now, I'm not going to give you three, five, ten or fifty points of what we can do.

As a church, as Christians, to save the planet. But I think where it starts is for each and every one of us to catch the awe and wonder of God and what he has created.

And like the psalmist says, once we see it through God's eyes, then, then maybe, we will be stirred into action. to be breathless with the awesome presence of God in creation and ask him to show us what we can do because we don't want to lose that.

To wake from our complacency or is it just another sunset? So how do you want us to reverse the mistakes we're making, Lord?

[16 : 23] Where does your church seek to champion your creation? Where do we act? Where do we speak? Where are we seeking to save this wonderful world? Not for our own preservation, but because of his, and it always has been.

Let's ask God to show us what to say, when to say it, how to act, and what to do. And he will show us because he loves it and loves us so much.
Amen.