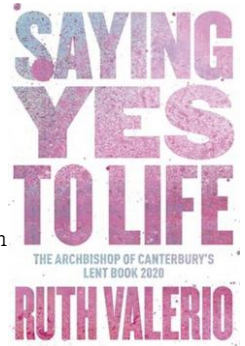


Week 6: Let the land produce creatures and let us make humankind in our image

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (Genesis 1.24-31)



Introduction

Many of us know the pleasure of seeing a deer leap across a field, a hedgehog scurry under a hedge or perhaps the warmth of being welcomed home by a much-loved dog. Encounters like these are precious as they underline the connection between us humans and the wider animal world.

In her book, *I Am With You*, Episcopal priest Kathryn Greene-McCreight said: 'There is no true humanity without other creatures of God.' A human on their own is not fully who they are meant to be. But humanity does not only exist within the human community: without the wider community of creatures that God has created, we cannot be what we have been created to be and we are the poorer for it. (p 137)

As with the creation of vegetation, sea creatures and birds, the land creatures are made 'according to their kinds'. Here we see a concern with biodiversity and the preservation of each separate and distinct species. We share this world with the most wonderful mix of strange, colourful, funny, scary, cuddly, scaly, odd, tiny, huge creatures that we could ever possibly imagine! Pause for a moment to think about the animals that live around you and give thanks to God for such an abundance of life. (pages 138-139)

As we have worked our way through Genesis 1 during this course, we have seen how the Bible is not only a story about human beings but a story about the whole world – indeed the whole universe! The story centres around people and God’s unfolding relationship with them, but the wider natural world is never far away. However, a world that God has created to be teeming with life is instead losing its life at an unparalleled rate. Thoughtlessness and selfishness make us all complicit. But alongside our sinfulness, we also bear the imprint of God in our own lives and that means we can act and bring about hope. (pages 140, 146)

The Seventh Day: Genesis 2:1-3

We come to the end of the first story of creation, with its symmetry: creation of spaces first and then the creatures to inhabit them. God now stops and rests. Tragically, in the very next chapter of Genesis, we see humanity fall from our intended state of shalom to a place of discord and enmity on all levels: with God, with one another, and with the wider created order. The rest of the Bible is the story of how God works to bring restoration: to put back to rights what has gone wrong and bring about the Sabbath rest that has been promised. (pages 164-165)

So too we approach the end of our Lenten travels, turning our eyes now to the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus. As we look towards Easter Sunday, we proclaim again our belief that Christ has died and Christ has risen – and that he will come again. As Amy Plantinga Pauw says: ‘Easter is God’s seal that the last word on creaturely life will be peace and praise, and the joy of that hope is already seeping into the present.’ (p 164-165)

Questions

Q1 Pope Francis calls this world ‘our common home’ and Richard Bauckham talks of ‘the community of creation’. What do these terms say to you?

Q2 This chapter explores what it means to be made in the image of God. In what ways can/do you reflect God’s image in your own life in relation to other people and the wider world?

Q3 ‘Holy Eating’: How willing are you to change the way you eat? What will you commit to doing?

Q4 What have you learnt through the book? What has been most memorable? On pp 168-69 Ruth Valerio outlines Pray, Act, Give. What will you do as a result of this Lent Course?

Resurrection churches, resurrection lives.

This is the calling that is on us as we look at all that God has made and say yes to life (p 169).