

Rev Margaret

Genesis 28.10-19, Psalm 139.1-11, 23-24, Romans 8.12-25, Matthew 13.24-30 (31-35)
36-43

I will begin with some words from Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann that may be familiar to some of you:

My people are not threatened by silence. They are completely at home in it. They have lived for thousands of years with Nature's quietness. My people today, recognise and experience in this quietness, the great Life-Giving Spirit, the Father of us all. It is easy for me to experience God's presence. When I am out hunting, when I am in the bush, among the trees, on a hill or by a billabong; these are the times when I can simply be in God's presence.

...

Our Aboriginal culture has taught us to be still and to wait. We do not try to hurry things up. We let them follow their natural course – like the seasons. We watch the moon in each of its phases. We wait for the rain to fill our rivers and water the thirsty earth...

...

We wait on God, too. His time is the right time. We wait for him to make his Word clear to us. We don't worry. We know that in time and in the spirit of dadirri (that deep listening and quiet stillness) his way will be clear.

We are River people. We cannot hurry the river. We have to move with its current and understand its ways.¹

I wanted to read these beautiful and familiar words because it seems that white people like me have just lately started to listen to the call of indigenous communities to live in a way that is more in tune with our natural environment, to pay attention to its rhythms and through our attentiveness to the voice of creation to become more attentive to the voice of our Creator.

It may seem as though this is something new for some of us, but our readings this morning show us that being in tune with our natural environment has been very much a part of our spiritual heritage right from the start.

In our Genesis reading we find Jacob on his way to find a wife to be his partner in building a family to bless the world. He has recently gained this birthright by employing a bit of trickery. Somehow, though he is not entirely honest, God appears to him and tells

¹ <https://www.dadirri.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Dadirri-Inner-Deep-Listening-M-R-Ungunmerr-Bauman-Ref1.pdf>

him that the promises made to Abraham and Isaac will continue to apply to him and his descendants.

God is like that, as we have seen before. There was nothing special about Abraham. There was nothing special about Isaac, and there is nothing special about Jacob. Yet here he is – the son of promise, passing through the land of promise, and he is met by the God who makes outrageous promises to unexemplary people.

Night falls and Jacob sleeps with his head on a rock. The rock meant nothing to him beyond his need to put his head on something as he slept. He was passing through a place that meant nothing to him beyond his need to get through it in order to reach his destination. But God met him there and showed him that this seemingly meaningless place was in fact a place of communication between Heaven and earth. And that ordinary rock pillow became a pillar to remind Jacob and others that God was there.

That is good for us to remember as we pass through our places of transition.

We are good at finding meaning in the past. We remember seeing God at work years back among the people of St Barnabas', St Michael's and St Paul's, answering prayer, providing what was needed, bringing people to Christ.

We are good at finding meaning in the future. I have felt a sense of optimism here about what God might do in the next phase of Hope, Ginninderra once we get past this transition thing.

But this place, the place of transition: this can feel like something we just have to get through in order to arrive at that beautiful future we are heading towards. But

Can we find meaning here?

Can we believe God will meet us here?

Can we believe *this* is the day that the Lord has made?

Not just the glorious past or the longed-for future but the rather ordinary and possibly tedious and disappointing today?

That's where God met Jacob, as he left his past behind and was not yet able to imagine his future: in a place between past and future, he saw a ladder between heaven and earth.

In John 1, we hear Jesus claim to be that ladder. He speaks of angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man, which is what he calls himself. Jesus, by being human and divine, creator and creation, connects heaven and earth.

Jesus broke the boundary between creator and creation, between God and humanity. And though he only walked around for thirty-something years, the implications of his life were for all time – past and future.

Because Jesus is the creator in creation, Jacob could lie down on an ordinary rock and find that he was actually sleeping on holy ground. We are in God's presence everywhere and everywhen.

God is not limited by church buildings.

This is a comforting truth, if you want to be with God, but as the author of Psalm 139 recounts, it is scary if you are trying to escape from God. I have met lots of people trying to escape from God – people who won't come through a church door because the angry, vengeful God they have been taught to believe in might drop a ceiling panel on them. I can understand why people who believe in an angry God might prefer to have God safely contained in special buildings so God might leave the rest of life alone.

But it's not like that:

Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
⁹ If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
¹⁰ even there...

Though I climb to the top of the Black Mountain Tower,

Or dive to the bottom of Lake Ginninderra

Even there...

Even there...

There are no secular spaces. God can find us everywhere.

Which can be scary if you believe in an angry God, but as the author of Psalm 139 discovered, when the God you can't escape finds you, it won't be to hurt you but to guide you, to hold you safe, and to turn your darkness into light.

We see in Genesis that God kept meeting Abraham and Sarah and their descendants. They were a seriously messed up family, but whenever God met them, God blessed them. If we asked what they ever did to deserve God's blessing, God would laugh and say, "When did I ever say anything about deserving?"

You can't escape from God because wherever you go in God's creation, God will be there. And that's good because – well – why would you want to escape from protection, provision and blessing?

In the Gospel reading, Matthew gives us lots of examples of how wisdom can be found by contemplating nature. Why is there evil in the world? Why doesn't God just get rid of it? Well, philosophers could argue over that for centuries, and they have... OR you can go for a walk in your garden, and you can notice that sometimes there are weeds that can't be killed without damaging the plants you love.

Maybe you have sometimes been tempted to douse your whole garden in Round-Up to get rid of all those nasty weeds once and for all. But you haven't done it because there are precious plants that would be killed along with the weeds. And the weeds would just come back the next year.

Why does God allow evil? Well, would you have God smite all the evil people with bolts of lightening? Would that actually make the world better? Even evil people have mothers who love them, and from the mother's perspective that smiting would be evil.

And what about those shadowy places in each of our hearts where that last little weed has managed to hide from the light of Christ? How is God to remove that without destroying all that is good in us?

A time will come for harvest, when all will be dealt with and each of us will be made totally pure, but until then we endure the weeds for the sake of the wheat.

And we notice that wisdom isn't always found when our hands are holding a book. Sometimes it is discovered when our hands are coated in soil.

And the best place to read Romans 8 is in a garden:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰ for the creation was subjected to futility, ..., in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; ²³ and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

The world is not as it should be. We are in pain and our world is in pain. War, tyranny, climate change, habitat destruction and species extinction, poverty, disease... Our world is hurting.

And we are hurting. We endure grief and anxiety, not because we are in a battle to bring nature into submission to humanity, but because humanity is not as we were created to be – and when we are fully mature in Christ, then creation will be healed along with us.

In pain and in redemption, we are connected and interconnected with all creation. The world is groaning because of us, and we are groaning because our life is hard; God the Son groaned in agony in the garden and on the cross; and the Spirit of God continues to groan within us. All of us are groaning: humanity, God and all creation. But our groaning is not futile. It tells us we are in labour.

New life is on its way. New Creation. Redemption, not just of our souls but of our bodies, and with our bodies the whole physical world.

This has been the Christian hope for 2,000 years – and the Jewish hope for long before that. And we are grateful to indigenous communities around the world for reminding us of what we have always known.

There is no such thing as secular space. Wisdom can be found anywhere, and God can find *you* wherever you are hiding; and by bringing each of us to full maturity in Christ, God is redeeming the whole world so that every single cubic centimetre of the universe will celebrate when fully redeemed and matured humanity take our place as custodians in humble service of creation.

So, as you attend to the groaning of creation this week, and maybe the groaning of your own body as well, may you also hear advance echoes of the eternal celebration into which we are all invited.

Amen