

Talk given on Environment Sunday 3 June 2018, at the Worship for All Service, Christ Church Totland Bay by Jane Walton

WORSHIP FOR ALL – 3 JUNE 2018

When my sisters and I were growing up, one of our favourite sets of books were 3 volumes of “Uncle Arthur’s Bible Stories”. Even the title sounds dated! It starts at the beginning – with the story of creation, probably today one of the most questioned aspects of the whole bible. But – leaving aside the timing of God’s creation – for who are we to know the length of a day at the beginning of time? – one thing cannot be denied. That God, having made this beautiful planet created man as its steward, as his representative. In the words of the bible in Genesis 1,

“Then God said “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock and all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground”. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God, he created him, male and female, he created them.

Uncle Arthur says:

“What a wonderful thing for Him to say! He might have said “Let us make man like a lion, only bigger and stronger, like an eagle, only with wings ten times as large, or like a mixture of all the animals so that he can move anywhere he pleases and be at home on land or in the air or under the sea. But He did nothing of the kind. He had something far greater and nobler in mind. For the pattern of this masterpiece of creation, He looked upon Himself!”

Isn’t that an awesome thought? That having created this wonderful planet, and the universe beyond, He made man in **His** image and put the human race in charge. That, having made all things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small, He made men and women to look after them. People, ordinary people and extraordinary, good and bad, rich and poor, Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, the faithful and the faithless, the selfish and the generous. But - how far we have *all* failed to live up to the responsibility of caring for this beautiful earth

When we hear the words Pacific Ocean, we think of clear blue waters teeming with multi-coloured fishes, and with palm fringed beaches, or do we?

Have you heard of the Great Pacific Garbage patch? It’s a floating island of discarded plastic, brought together by tides and currents, **three times** the size of France – over 1.6 million square kilometres and 80,000 tons. And it’s growing fast.

What do we know about plastic? Well, it's essential to our daily lives in so many different ways and is undoubtedly one of the most important inventions of the past century or so. But the time has come for us to look carefully at how we use it and, more importantly, how we dispose of it. It lasts for a long, long time. As it ages, and in contact with UV light, it becomes brittle and breaks into tiny pieces – micro-plastics. These pieces are being absorbed by fishes and other sea creatures at an alarming rate and often lead to premature death, the inability to breed and failure, through malnutrition, of young to reach maturity. The world uses 1,500 plastic bottles every second (that's 5.4 million per hour), and disposes of 300 million tons of plastic every year, of which 8 million tons enter the world's oceans, mostly having been dumped near or on rivers. It has been calculated, following intense scientific survey that the Great Pacific Garbage Patch alone contains 1.8 trillion pieces of plastic, varying in size from huge crates, to discarded electronic devices, sprawling fishing nets, and those tiny pieces...that's 250 for every man, woman and child on the planet. And there are another four growing patches in other seas and oceans. We only have to look at the beaches here in our own parish to know that this is not someone else's problem. It's ours too and it's here, now, on our own doorstep.

It's just not enough to decide to be more careful from now on. Some of the stuff making up these patches has been bobbing around for 40 years and more, just as the start of global warming probably dates back to some degree to when the industrial revolution was in its infancy. But that doesn't mean that we can wash our hands of it, that we're not responsible for the actions of those who have gone before us. That we don't need to put things right before we do even more terrible damage to God's beautiful earth.

It has to be our job, for the sake of generations to come to make the world a better, cleaner place. A place where coral reefs don't die, or where whole species don't become extinct every year through destruction of habitats. A place where parched barren lands and poisoned soil no longer lead to starvation and death, so that all people may enjoy God's bounty with enough to eat in peace and comfort.

God created our beautiful world, the glorious heavens, sunrise and sunset, winter and summer. And he made *us*, his people – fearfully and wondrously made us, as David says in Psalm 139.

His people, His earth; He gave us so much; we give so little in return. Let us ask God for His help, to show that love, respect and care for His creation, that He intended.