

GENESIS 1:9-13
GOD'S LAND; OUR LAND?

When we celebrate the world as God's creation, what's the picture in our heads? Is it a picture of beautiful hills, next to a fantastic loch, with the sun setting in the background? Is it this kind of inspiring picture that will get onto the front page of the calendar and we love to look at it for days? Different kinds of landscape do the same thing for us; the world is full of inspiring landscapes that fill us with awe and that remind us of the wonderful world that we live in and that God is its creator. Or is it a picture of a slightly more man-made landscape, of rolling fields of golden grain against a blue sky? This is still a picture that makes us feel good; this is the world we know and the world that we're happy to celebrate as something God has made. Or is it a picture of a landscape more and more shaped by human hands as, for example, the rainforest is cut further and further back to be replaced by palm trees for oil production? The world is changed by this and we're not quite so sure that it is something to celebrate; it raises anxieties for the future of the planet. Or is it a picture of a landscape that seems to have been destroyed in our efforts to dig gold out of the ground, the picture of mines and their waste left behind? Is this the world that God has made? Finally, it might be a picture of dried river beds, with people trying to scratch a living and being hungry and poor and the land seems to be punishing them rather than providing for them. Is this the land that God has made? Can we celebrate this as God's creation?

The answer is that they are all part of God's created world. That's easier to declare for some of these images of the world than for others, but they are all part of the world that God has made. In Genesis chapter 1, the man of faith looks at the world and declares that God is the creator of everything. This is a statement of faith; God has created the world and everything in it. Last week, we saw that God created light: "*Let there...*" (*Genesis 1:3*) and we marvel at that; today "*God said...*" (*Genesis 1:9f*) and here we have a declaration of faith that as we look at the world, land and sea, we can say, by faith "God made this." Genesis 1 is not a scientific textbook; this is not the 'how' of the formation of the universe, but something of the 'why' of the universe, that God made everything to be good and to reflect something of His glory and majesty.

God created the sea and the land and made them different. "*let the...*" (*Genesis 1:9f*) If I present you with a world map, you'd familiar with it. The places we know are where we expect them to be and all is well and good. But it wasn't always this way: the continents were once in different places and were a different shape and are constantly moving even today. Earthquakes are the evidence that landmasses are always moving; under the sea, volcanoes are producing new pieces of land that will come to the surface in future; the continents are drifting, some further apart, some closer together. James Hutton, the famous eighteenth century Edinburgh geologist was among the first to suggest this as an explanation of the 'how' of landmasses; Arthur's Seat provided him with evidence of these processes; the institute that bears his name is still looking for solutions to issues of land use and sustainability. Sadly, Hutton saw his discoveries as evidence that the Bible was wrong! For all that science, there is still room for the person of faith to declare that God made this; God created the land and the sea.

Genesis 1 declares that this world is a fertile world. "*let the...*" (*Genesis 1:11*) The land is not just dirt, but is earth full of life and gives life to a huge variety of species of plants and because there are plants, there are animals. This is not a barren world; how many plant species are there across the world? We just need to look at our gardens to see something of this fertile world that God has made. At harvest we sing about planting seed and harvesting it, but in between we celebrate that "God made it grow". Later, in verse 21, the man of faith will make the same declaration about the sea, teeming with life, with all sorts of fish and other marine animals; the sea is full of them. We have a pond in our garden and we went pond-dipping with our grandsons the other day to see what we could find: we found leeches, worms, lice, tiny

snails, and diving beetles, and that's just in a small pond; the sea is full of plants and animals, teeming with life. The world that God made is fertile; it is a life-giving world; it is a world that is able to sustain life and we are glad of that! We are part of this world, we share its life and we depend on it for our life.

There is a picture of a garden. The story of Genesis 2 is set in a garden, in the east; Adam and Eve are in the garden and are to look after God's garden. The garden is a fertile place and there are lots of plants for food, but there are also limits to the garden for Adam and Eve, certain trees that are not for eating, as a test of their obedience to God. The garden describes our relationship with God and with God's world. It is God's garden; He is the Creator and ultimately everything is His. We are part of His world and the garden shows us that we are to be stewards of God's world on God's behalf. We are to use the garden for our benefit; we are to look after the garden on God's behalf, always remembering that it is God's garden and that He is Lord.

Here is one of the big issues of the way things are in the world today: we are stewards of the planet, so how do we use it in a wise way, in a way that pleases God? It is entirely right to grow crops and to make sure we have enough food and there is enough food in the world for everyone, although it is ill-divided! How do we make sure that we don't abuse the planet and exploit the world in a way that damages the planet and leaves people poor and vulnerable? Some would argue that to ask these questions now is too late; we have abused the planet and it is damaged beyond repair and many are poor because some have been greedy and taken too much! The big issue of climate change is the result of the way we have used the planet and the poorest in the world are the ones who suffer most with the rise in global temperature. Are we to preserve the rain forest or create palm-oil plantations? That's just one example!

What can we do to look after God's world? Let me tell you a story from Brazil: "It's easy to understand why Brazilian farmer Pedro Santana Oliveira has struggled to feed his family when you try and get to his smallholding. The track to his place is so sandy that any vehicle has difficulty getting traction and the same sand goes all the way through the soil around his home, making crop growing extremely hard work. There was a reservoir of water but changing climate means it has dried up, leaving Pedro and his neighbours facing seven-mile round-trips to fetch water from the nearest source. It's little wonder that many locals are giving up working the land in favour of migrating to Brazil's cities. Pedro has had help to install a rainwater harvesting tank to capture whatever falls when the heavens do open and an irrigation system which uses solar panels to power a pump that moves the water around to serve 20 families. Pedro has now started growing crops again for his family's consumption and hopes to be able to sell them in the market soon.

Tearfund campaigns on climate change because extreme weather patterns hit the poorest people hardest. Poor communities across the world tell us they are already feeling the impacts of changes to their environment. Unpredictable rainfall means more droughts and floods. More droughts mean a greater risk of famine, more floods mean greater destruction of homes and livelihoods, and the potential for infectious diseases to race through the population. The bible tells us that 'love does no harm to its neighbour', yet the way we live now harms our neighbours in poor countries. Tearfund is campaigning to convince world leaders to take drastic action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and help poor countries adapt to the devastating impacts of climate change." Can we support these campaigns?

In Romans 8 Paul offers us a different view on creation. He writes about creation being subject to frustration and decay, groaning in the pains of childbirth. We live in a world that has problems and issues as we have seen, a world that is in decay; creation is polluted and groaning. But the New Testament has a hope of a new creation, that God will create a new heaven and new earth one day. There are all kinds questions raised by that notion, but let's see the simple truth for today: God will create a new heaven and a new earth and the hope

and future of creation is totally tied up with our hope and future as the children of God. Creation will have its freedom as a result of the children of God being glorified. Our hope is that we will share Jesus's glory and that His glory will touch our whole being; we will be new people, with new bodies. As we have that hope for ourselves, so all creation has the hope that it will be made new, set free, at liberty to be the creation that God made it to be in first place.

Creation is also supremely connected to Jesus: *"Through Him..." (John 1:3)* One of the great twists of Christian faith is here: how can Jesus be both the Son of God, the creator, and a real human being at the same time? The Bible simply declares that this is how it is! So when we marvel at creation and praise God for His amazing universe, the picture is only complete when we put Jesus, the Son of God, the Son of man, in that picture too! He is the One who gives life; He is the One who stands at the centre of everything; our Saviour is King of all creation and deserves our worship.

This is our world: God is the creator. That is a declaration of faith. Others, starting perhaps with James Hutton, will tell you how the world works, how the land is formed and has been shaped in the past; how the world works today. There is still room for me to say "this is my faith: *"By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command."* (Heb 11:3) That's what the man of faith in Genesis 1 declares; that's what I am happy to declare today. This is God's world; God made this; we are stewards of His world; we celebrate the wonderful world that we live in; here's the challenge - how do we look after God's world faithfully and well?