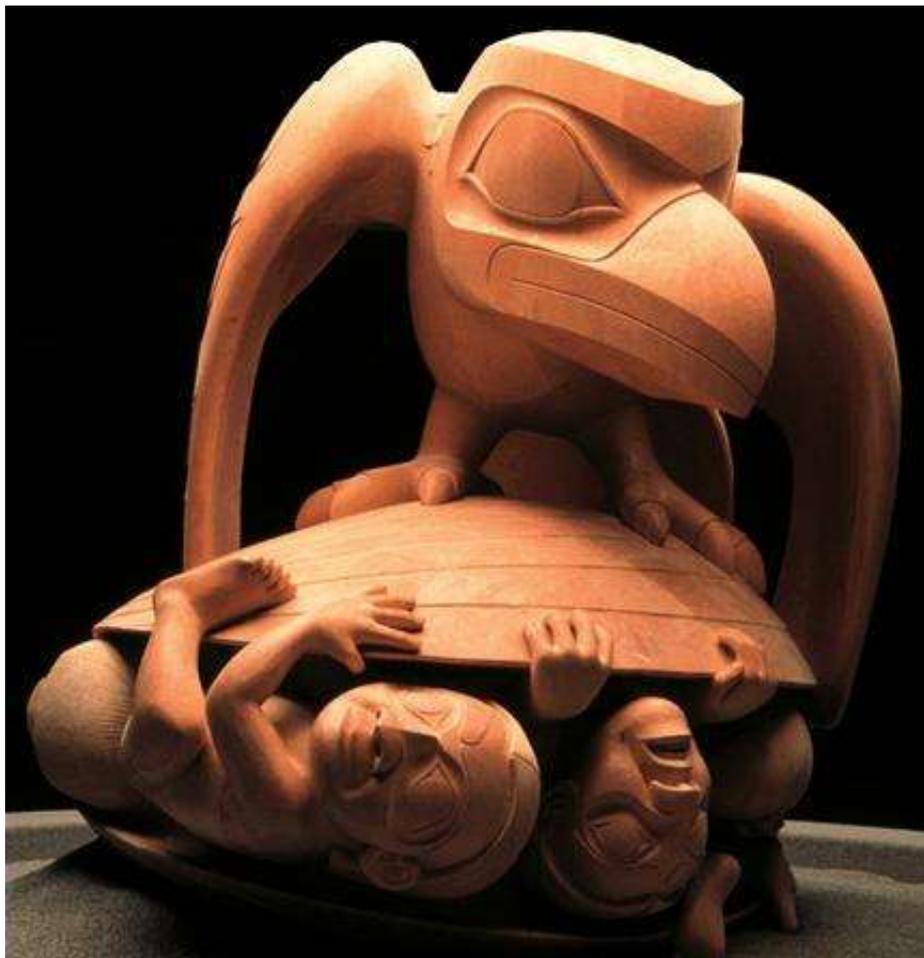


St James's Church Piccadilly London • [sjp.org.uk](http://sjp.org.uk)  
Sermon • Harvest Sunday • 8 October 2017  
Job 37.5-15, Psalm 19, Matthew 6.25-34  
The Revd Ivan Khovacs

## creation in a drop of rain

There's a creation story I learned while I was living in Vancouver, British Columbia. It is the story of creation known to the Haida First Nations people of BC, and it tells us something about the Haidas sense of belonging to nature, and about their gratitude to the Creator who gave them a place to live nestled between the mountain and the sea.

*At the beginning of time, before there any other living beings on land, Raven was flying over the ocean. Coasting along the shores of what is now British Columbia, Raven spotted a clamshell. Raven flew down and plucked the shell from the sea, carried it in its beak, and dropped the shell on the beach. When the clam hit the sand, the first humans climbed out of the shell onto land. And they became the Haida, which, in their language, simply means, the people.*



Haida artist Bill Reid's yellow cedar sculpture of the creation story: <https://goo.gl/3wSGV5>

"God's voice thunders wondrously,  
doing great things we cannot understand. ...  
The shower of rain, great or small,

serves as a sign on everyone's hand,  
a sign for everyone whom God has made.”

William Blake, in his poem, sees “a World in a Grain of Sand ...”

In this Old Testament passage, the whole story of creation is contained in an instance of cloud and rain: 13.7 billion years of earth history re-lived in a single drop of rain.

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The feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether tells us that creation stories tell us two things. Creation stories, she says, “reflect the assumptions about how the divine and the mortal, ... humans and other humans, ... humans, animals, land, waters, and stars are related to each other.” But at the same time, she says, ‘Creation stories ... reflect current science, that is, the assumptions about the nature of the world, physical processes, and their relationships.’<sup>1</sup>

So there are two sides to the coin: on one hand, creation stories orchestrate into a single narrative earth history, beliefs about who we are and where we come from. On the other hand, Radford Ruether is telling us that creation stories reveal the extent of what science is able to tell us at a given point in time.

If you were to ask someone from the Haida nation if their creation story is different from the one we find in Genesis, they would say no—it’s the same story, they are different only in the details.

The story of creation in Genesis tells us that we come from God, we are created for relationship with one another, and we come from and belong to the rest of the creation. The Haida story, likewise, says that we come from the hand of the Creator, we belong in relationship with others, and exist in a fragile relationship with the rest of the creation. This three way relationship is the foundation of all life. That means, of course, that we are – by design – vulnerable to anything that threatens that three-way relationship, with God, with others, and with the natural world.

Radford Ruether is someone seeking to live a Christian life with an ecological ethos. This precisely why she insists that creation stories both call us to reverence and they compel us to seek knowledge of the origins and makings of the natural world: this is why she insists, – and rightly so, – that if we are a people of faith, we need to be also a people of science.

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Stephen Hawking, one of the greatest scientific minds of our time, arrives at a different conclusion. In his book *The Grand Design* (2010), Hawking concludes that the universe is a result of its own making; that it is entirely self-contained, and is the product of essential, pre-existing physical laws, like gravity.

“Spontaneous creation – says Hawking – is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist. It is not necessary to invoke God to light the [fuse] and set the universe going” (p. 180).

Hawking’s idea is that the laws of the universe have always existed as they are. But what he doesn’t tell us is where these laws come from: how did they come about?

Now, that may not be something that science can answer for us, or not at this time. But that’s all the more reason to probe further the mysteries of the universe. Science deepens our wonderment of the world we live in, science, – which we celebrate today in our ECO FUN PALACE, along with gifts of creativity, and art, and imagination – brings us closer to the marvels and mysteries of our

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<sup>1</sup> *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology* (1993)

planet. And ultimately, it leads us to discovery and to developments to make this a better world for this and for future generations.

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What I find specially challenging in the biblical telling and retellings of the creation story is that the biblical writers insist that the natural world doesn't exist merely to fulfill human need, or to help us advance our purposes. It does that too, and so we celebrate and give thanks for harvest and the abundance we receive from the earth.

But in the Bible, creation is already treasured in God's eyes, without any need to invoke benefit to humans. In fact, the world has its beauty and gain its particular value precisely because it is cherished by God: God created the heavens and the earth. And God saw that it was good." What God sees, is made good.

In the Psalm that we sang responsively, Psalm 19, we have this grand, telescoping perspective of the universe; it places us at the very origins of the creation, and in the midst of God's unfolding purposes:

"The heavens are telling the story of God,  
and the firmament shows forth the work of God's hands.  
There is no speech, no words; no voice is heard;  
yet their speech goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world."

This is a vision not of eternity, but of the world you and I live in. This poet being this Psalm is not waxing lyrical about some heavenly by and by. This is about earth, sea, and sky in the here and now. And for the Psalmist, the creation all around us is God's musical instrument: the whole of the universe, – sky, forests, and seas — tell their stories without words; nature revels in her mysteries and hidden meanings, and she insists on speaking God's praise in a music and a language all her own.

The Psalm, again, like Haida creation story, tells us that love of God is inseparable from love of nature— as if to say: if you cannot stop, and pay attention to, and learn from, and love the natural world that you see, how can you love and hear from God whom you do not see.

It is not surprising, then, that Jesus directs our attention to nature itself as the teacher for our faith and trust in God. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says,

Consider the lilies of the field, and learn from them: see how they grow; they neither toil nor spin. And if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and gone tomorrow, will he not do far more with you and your life?

This is another re-telling of the creation story in miniature. And, once again, the message is clear! God's love of humanity is intertwined with God's love of the natural world. Faith and science, matter and spirit come together. Or, to put it in the words of another well-known Psalm ... "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it; the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24).

Now we're beginning to clue in. Why do we take this day to celebrate the God of the harvest and the many gifts of creation? And why we have invited so many to do the same with us? To bring their science and expertise to help us probe, with curiosity, wonderment, and creativity?

Because we live in a world that God loves. And we live with the conviction that God has given us a share in his love for the world he has made.

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The American farmer and poet Wendell Berry tells us that

“There are no unsacred places;  
there are only sacred places  
and desecrated places...”

We know only too well the extent to which God’s creation has been desecrated, not only by human greed, but quite frankly, by a growing need for energy and raw materials to sustain our growing populations.<sup>2</sup>

And we have seen only too recently what happens when natural disaster rages -- against populations in the Caribbean, the coast of Mexico, and the Southern United States.

The Apostle Paul tells us in the New Testament that the earth is raging!

Romans 8.22 – “The whole creation has been groaning with the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.”

Here at St James’s we are, together, re-discovering the wonder of creation, and our place in the earth’s redemption.

We are incredibly gifted with passionate, visionary leaders working to bring our church in line with the message that we -- of all people – have good reason to care for the planet, that we love the world that God has made, and that want to flesh out that passion in practical action.

Behind our ECO FUN PALACE and celebration of science and creative endeavour is our eco-Church ethos. It is, if you like, the greening of our faith. This is something we want to grow and encourage in each other. In practical terms, it means, – for example, – that we are now using 100% recycled paper. The order of service you have in your hands, is quality, recycled paper. And this came from discussions, and a deliberate commitment on the part of our PCC.

There are other initiatives in this church that also share our Eco Church ethos: So, for example, ShareAction. This is a charity that mobilises people concerned for social and environmental justice, and taking action through the investment system.

But Eco Church is itself the result of a wider vision for the churches: a partnership between charities like St Paul’s Institute, Christian Aid, Tearfund and A Rocha UK.

Our goal is to achieve GOLD STATUS in the Eco Church sustainability award scheme. And we are on our way! And to get there we are integrating environmental care throughout our church: in our worship, in prayer, in teaching, and long term development plans, in the management of buildings and land.

We need to do this also, however, on a personal level. This is where each one of us comes, and where the personal commitments and lifestyle of church members makes a difference—recycling, energy use reduction, green alternatives, are only the beginning. The point is that all of us have a part in this.

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We of all people, we as Christians, who should be the first in conservation and defending the planet. Christianity is a faith of incarnation: it’s a story that the Son of God covered himself in human flesh, and in the flesh, embraced the world as his own, planted himself in the humus; Jesus

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<sup>2</sup> This is why I find the language of “natural resources” a language that steers me dangerously into the desecration of the planet: it isn’t of course, God’s good creation:

trod this Earth, and at the cross, sent roots deep into the ground, shed blood on the earth below. And from that soil, God brought up new life, that we might live perched on Christ, the Tree of Life.

So, as the farmer and poet Wendell Berry tells us in his Mad Farmer's Manifesto

Friends,  
every day  
do something that won't compute.  
Love the Lord.  
Love the world.  
Work for nothing.

Invest in the millenium.  
Plant sequoias.

Put your faith  
in the two inches of humus  
that will build under the trees  
every thousand years.

Lie down in the shade.  
Practice resurrection.<sup>3</sup>

Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> The full text of Wendell Berry's 'Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front' is found on <http://goo.gl/GTLE1t>.