

## **Sermon 26 September – Season of creation week 4: Pray and Act for our common home**

On Friday we celebrated Heritage Day. A day that reminds us of the rich diversity of our country. A diversity which should be celebrated but sometimes times causes division instead. There is great opportunity to learn more about one another – the things we like or dislike, the reasons why we do or do not do certain things – the values and beliefs we have... But sometimes we choose to focus on the differences rather than on what we have in common and what we can learn from one another. When we focus on our differences and the different ways in which we do things we create barriers - groups of “insiders” and “outsiders”. We create barriers between ourselves as citizens of one country, as churches who share one faith in the same Lord and as humanity called to protect and care for our common home – earth.

Today is our fourth week of the season of creation and the theme for today is Pray and Act for our common home. In the same way that we are different in the way we look, the clothes we wear and the values we have, so we are also different in the way we pray and act in caring for God’s creation.

You will notice that the church seems to be a bit untidy today. There are papers and leaves and tissues lying around on the floor and in the benches. Now I am going to ask you to please pick up whatever you see near you so that we can have a clean and tidy space to worship in. Oh... that’s good. But why does it seem as if you are not getting rid of everything? That’s right! I am creating a problem for you. As you are cleaning up, so I am messing. Making it hard for you to follow my instruction of cleaning up and do the right thing. I have created a problem - put a barrier in your way. Do you know what a barrier is? A barrier is something that blocks or prevents something from happening.

Now some barriers are good and are for our own protection. Like fences around pools that protect children from falling in and drowning. Or those we find in zoos, which prevent the animals from getting out and hurting people who are visiting the zoo. Sometimes we want to play with our friends and we don’t do our chores or school work and then our teachers and parents separate us from our friends or stop us from playing with them so that we can do what we are supposed to do. In this case they take away the problem – or stumbling block – that was preventing us from

doing what we know is the right thing to do. But sometimes barriers make it hard to follow the rules and do what's right. Like when I kept messing up earlier on.

One of the things Jesus speaks about in the gospel story today are stumbling blocks - barriers. He tells the disciples that they should not do anything to others or themselves that makes it difficult to do the right thing. Or that makes it harder for them to learn and do the things that God wants them to do. In other words, they should not create barriers – stumbling blocks – in the way of themselves and other people which prevent them from following God's ways. Jesus says, very strongly, that if something is getting in your way and keeping you from making good choices – from doing what God wants - you need to get rid of it. This is not easy. We get so used to doing things in a particular way. And sometimes we do not even realise that they are hurtful or that they are a stumbling block to someone else – that they cause others to do the wrong thing.

So, what Jesus is saying to his disciples, and to us, is that if we see someone helping someone else, we should not stop them. Rather we should help them, work with them, to help others. Or if we know someone who is learning to listen to God – learning to pray or reading the bible – then we should not make it harder for them by distracting them or making fun of them. Rather we should pray with, and for, them, teach them, and show them by the way we live how to listen to God.

Just as we need to pray to God for ourselves and one another so that we can know how to act towards one another in a loving way, so we also need to pray to God to show us how we can do the right thing in caring for creation. We need to learn to work with other people. Whether they are like us or belong to our church or community – or not. We should work together with all people who are working towards the preservation of our environment. We need to pray for our attitudes that prevent – that are stumbling blocks to – reconciliation and restoration between God, humanity and creation. Because it is through prayer that we can connect with other others and be guided by God to help us act together with others in ways that serve God's purposes.

So, this week there are two things I would like you to do that can help you practice praying and acting for our common home. The first is that I would like you to do is to

lookout for stumbling blocks – the food, water and electricity that we waste, the litter we drop, the way we treat others who are different to us. We need to pray and ask God to help us find a way to get rid of those stumbling blocks so that we can act in ways that preserve and protect our relationships and creation. The second thing is that I would like you to do, is to collect some seeds and instructions for growing your own vegetables, after church, so that we can begin to create food resources that can support us and also help us not to drain and squander the resources of the earth more than we have already done.

Will you do this? Good. Now let us pray

Dear God,

Sometimes life's stumbling blocks can get in our way and make it difficult to follow your example. Help us to move the stumbling blocks we come across out of the way. Help us not to be stumbling blocks to other people but to work together with them through prayer and action for the good of all creation.

Amen