

## **Sky Sunday – Rev'd Christine Barren – 3<sup>rd</sup> in Season Of Creation - 20<sup>th</sup> Sept 2009**

**Readings – Genesis 15: 1 – 6, Psalm 19: 1 – 6, “The Gamble” by Shirley Murray, Mark 15: 33 – 39**

I wonder how many of you found your breath taken away by the latest pictures that have been sent back to earth by the Hubble telescope. When I saw them in the paper last week I was overwhelmed by their beauty but also by the sheer magnitude of the cosmos. It seemed to reinforce how impossible it is to even start to comprehend its beauty but also the distances, and the measurements of time and space.

For me, at least at the first reading, it also made the gospel we have just heard confusing and somehow not relevant to the place and space I was in. Perhaps you also have found yourself wondering why we hear of the death of Jesus on Sky Sunday. However as I started to explore how I might make sense of both the gospel and the poem by Shirley Murray that you have just heard read, things started to become clearer.

Those who have been here over the past two Sundays, are aware that our exploration of creation has been a balance between taking responsibility for the damage that has been done to the earth and celebrating its beauty as a gift of God. Our readings this morning continue to do this. We understand something of the grandeur of God in the star filled sky that is revealed to Abram and yet we also discover that as Jesus died the sky was black - veiled from sight as the Holy of holies was veiled from view in the temple.

Both Abram and those around the cross were searching for something. Abram was challenged by God to be the father of a new nation but he failed to believe that he could do it as he had no heirs. God led him outside his tent and challenged him to look up into the night time sky.

*“Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them  
.....so shall your descendants be”*

Can't you imagine just a little how Abram must have felt – filled with wonder yet slightly overwhelmed. I often go out onto the upstairs balcony outside our bedroom and look out into the starlit sky as it stretches towards the horizon over Westernport Bay. I feel very close to God there, as though each star is a pinprick of light that enables me to see and feel in some small way, the presence of the God I worship. Yet I have also been out on that balcony when the sky is dark black – so covered in cloud that not a star can be seen. Is that what it was like, I wonder, as the sky turned black as Jesus died?

What we cannot ignore is that we human beings have lived in such a profligate way that the very sky speaks of the damage we have done. We know that holes now exist which rather than being magic moments of light that tell us of God, rather have the potential to destroy our planet. We are called to try and stop that damage continuing. This is the powerful connection that Shirley Murray makes in the final verse of her poem about those defining moments at the cross.

*“and now we throw the dice  
the earth is slowing dying  
the world is turning black  
the planet's voice is crying.....”*

Words of great power and truth and yet I think there is a danger that if this becomes all that we see as we look heavenward, we may lose sight of the grace that is still ours to hold and to share. I realise that, for me, the sky in all her moods is symbolic of who I am as God's beloved child. The grace I find revealed on a starry night is the grace that God gives me if only I will accept it. However the other side of that grace is the profound darkness that was revealed on that hill outside Jerusalem as Jesus died. This too is part of who I am, and it is this that can destroy me if I let it.

Through the week, I found myself returning to that gospel that I thought did not have much to say to me about the sky! As so often happens, I found the unexpected in familiar words of scripture.

*“Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. **and the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom...**”*

and I was also reminded of a few words we heard read on the first Creation Sunday just a few weeks ago.

*“**and God separated the light from the darkness**”.....*

Somehow today these two become connected for me. I am searching for something to break through the darkness. Perhaps the darkness can be pierced by living lights as beautiful as the stars I see from my balcony. However the gospel we have just heard presents us with another way of looking at darkness being separated and light being revealed.

Can you place yourself just outside the Holy of Holies as that curtain is torn open and the presence of God streams forth revealed to any who has the courage to be open to it. God seems to be saying

*“With this – my supreme gift to you – you need no longer be separated from me”*

Perhaps the sky is God's way of revealing something of God's self to those who would look, not only at the sky, but also inside themselves. Just as the writer of Mark's gospel told of the darkness over the earth as Jesus was dying and then of the letting in of the light with the symbolic tearing of the veil in the temple; so God's grace continues to be revealed to us in the ever changing patterns in the skies. We only need to look - not just with our eyes but with our hearts, with our souls.

So let me return to those amazing images I spoke of at the start. They are the most wonderful and profound pointers to a God who cannot be contained in what we think we understand of our world, any more than with Jesus' death and resurrection, God could be contained in the Holy of Holies in the temple. Yet they are also perfect in their beauty.

We must never forget the darkness that we find as we wait at the foot of the cross. We must never stop searching for a way to break through that darkness. However God calls us also to simply give thanks for the cosmos that stretches out from earth. We recognise God in its vastness and in its beauty.

Christine Barren