

“Do not take the place of honour”. A sermon on Luke 14: 1 and 7-14 for Season of Creation

This sermon was given by George Dow, Chair of Green Christian, at St Mary's Penzance, on 31 August 2025, on the eve of Creationtide.

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A short prayer ...

Creator God, may the words that I speak be what you would wish us to hear.

Amen

The Gospel passage which we have just heard emphasises humility and generosity, specifically in the context of hospitality and community. It highlights the importance of prioritising the needs of others, especially those who are marginalised or unable to reciprocate, over seeking personal status or gain.

Whenever I've heard any talks or discussions on this passage it always assumes that what we are talking about here is, exclusively, the relationship between humans. How we should be treating each other, how we can truly be inclusive and in community together.

But sometimes, for me, the parables and other teachings offer us an **opportunity to** wonder.

Wondering if there are other ways – perhaps deeper and wider ways – to which the teachings might be applied both then and now.

So on this morning, on the very eve of the worldwide churches' **Season of Creation** – sometimes called Creationtide – which starts on 1st September and runs through the 5 weeks up to 4th October, St Francis day, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology who was revered for his love and care for all creation, treating animals and nature with respect and love.

So, I think that it is entirely appropriate today to wonder whether Christ's teaching in this reading might be applicable to not only humans with whom we share our lifetimes on earth, but also to humans everywhere in the world, and to our familial descendants (our children, and perhaps grandchildren not yet born, great grandchildren and so on) and all future generations of our fellow humans everywhere in the world, indeed also to all our neighbours in creation both human and non-human, including animals and plants. And when I refer this morning to the word 'creation', I'm including all of these elements.

So let's draw out some of the themes of the passage and explore how they might be applied in this context – to include all living things in God's beautiful creation.

I suggest that there are two key themes which can specifically include creation care ...

The first is **Humility** – that we should have a humble relationship with our fellow creatures, and the land and the sea. Just as we are to be humble in our social interactions, as the

passage clearly states, so too should we approach creation with a humble and non-exploitative attitude.

Examples of how humans exploit the earth are now well-known and reported on an almost daily basis in these times, activities like deforestation for agriculture and resources, pollution of air and water from industrial processes and waste, the overconsumption of resources leading to depletion of freshwater, forests, and species, and the climate crisis driven largely by burning fossil fuels. These actions degrade habitats, reduce biodiversity, and disrupt vital natural systems, leading to negative consequences for ecosystems and human well-being.

Instead, we are called to recognise our place within creation, not above it, and stewarding its resources responsibly. Not subduing it for our own perceived needs, not dominating it as the word 'dominion' has been so horribly and deliberately misinterpreted for personal and immediate gain.

I do think words are important when we talk about our relationship with our fellow beings. And, personally, I find the word 'environment' unhelpful and rather clinical as it implies something completely outside and independent of ourselves, whereas we are all part of the whole system which God has created, with all elements being interdependent.

The Gospel passage reflects a reversal of what has traditionally been accepted as the correct social order, and instead valuing the marginalised in creation. In the same way as Christ calls for the inclusion of human-marginalised people in social gatherings, this can be extended to all of God's creation.

Every creature, no matter how seemingly insignificant or "unproductive," has intrinsic value and deserves care. By extending invitations to the least among us, whether human or the broader creation, we reflect the subversive order of God's reign. This encourages a radical hospitality that values all beings, ultimately bringing honour to the Creator.

Now, I need to be careful here. What if in our home we have an infestation of ants or mice or rats? Are we saying we shouldn't do anything other than 'care' for them? Well, no!

I do think however that we might start by asking why these creatures have suddenly appeared and, in some cases, call in experts to deal with them, certainly in the case of rats, as we had to do a few years ago – and then took measures to stop it happening again. Luckily, we are able to delegate the mice challenge by having a cat!

And in the case of the ants, is it really a problem? Are they just not doing what they do without harming anyone?

Ants offer significant ecological benefits by aerating and enriching soil, acting as natural pest control agents, dispersing plant seeds, breaking down organic matter for nutrient cycling, and serving as a food source for other wildlife.

And I was reading only yesterday that the population of earthworms in the UK, so vital to the quality of our soil, have declined by a third over the past 25 years due to pesticides and over-tilling the soil. Although how you count the earthworms is way beyond me!

The second key theme is what we might call **Going Beyond Reciprocity**.

Reciprocal relationships are those where there is a mutual exchange of benefits. But in the passage, Christ is calling us to go beyond that kind of relationship, that ...

“when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind”.

The call to invite those who can't repay us mirrors the principle of caring for creation without demanding a tangible return. Our efforts to care should be motivated by a sense of duty and love for God's creation, not by what we stand to gain from it. Although there is in fact an ultimate and eternal gain, again from the passage ...

“And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous”.

And what I have in mind here are all those people who we don't know and are already feeling the devastating effects of the climate crisis, whose homes and land have either been burned or flooded. And all the future generations who will ultimately suffer more of this unless urgent action is taken. They can't personally repay us, but wouldn't it be a wonderful legacy to hand over to them a world which was in a better state than it is now?

And finally, there's this famous quote from Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* which I've stuck on our fridge door, so I see it every morning! ...

"Love all God's creation, both the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of light. Love the animals, love the plants, love each separate thing. If you love each thing you will perceive the mystery of God in all; and when you perceive this, you will grow every day to a fuller understanding of it, until you come at last to love the whole world with a love that will then be all-embracing and universal".

Students of William Blake will recognise that Dostoevsky was borrowing a line from Blake's poem "Auguries of Innocence" ...

"To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wildflower, / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour".

And so, God has created every living thing, no matter how big or small and, while some may have metamorphosed into something else, like a fossil into the surface of a rock or a caterpillar into a butterfly, the original creator of all forms is our God.

So, what might all this mean for us, at this time and in our own lives?

Well , we know as a church, we are on a continuous Eco Church journey and have been now for the past few years been attempting to demonstrate our care for creation in

worship and teaching – our Sunday morning intercessions, our occasional talks (like this morning) and courses, such as this year's green Lent course

our church building and use of energy – with the installation of the infra-red heating system this year – look at the beautiful Halos above your heads

our churchyard, with help from Cormac and working with our nearby neighbours in sowing and planting,

There is always more work to do in all of this, and we do our best to ensure that we maintain the good things we've achieved and look forward to other opportunities to serve, perhaps in the field of active global engagement with a project and in reviewing our own personal lifestyles (me included) as Christians who value creation care.

And with that in mind, in the autumn some time, I'll be inviting church members to participate in a voluntary survey which could give us all ideas on how to have a greener lifestyle.

But for the purposes of this morning, rather than suggesting 3 or 4 things which we might do, can I suggest that we dwell on just one thing?

And that is, during these 5 weeks of Creationtide, that we commit – in whatever prayer or contemplation practice that we are following - to include each day a time when we focus on how we might better care for God's beautiful world, how we might live life more gently on the earth and hold the 2 key themes from the passage in our minds and hearts

Having a humble, non-exploitative relationship with the earth and all living things, remembering the marginalised in creation, recognising that every creature, no matter how seemingly insignificant or "unproductive," has intrinsic value.

And doing all this without demanding a tangible return.

Amen