

As Rebecca mentioned at the beginning of the service, we are outside this week because the organ builders are back. They're busy working away in the organ loft. And apparently by this time next week, we'll start to hear the organ. 30% of the pipes will be working. And that's very exciting.

So, we're outside. And actually, it's very timely being outside because we're beginning a short season of creation here at St. James. And we are fortunate to be in a beautiful place where the wonderful beauty of God's creation is so evident with this lovely 100-year-old dragon tree above me. And then just to my left, I've got a lovely view of the ocean. The beauty and wonder of God's creation is all around us here out on our patio.

As the psalmist said, "The heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament proclaims his handiwork." We're worshipping today in the midst of God's handiwork. Christian thought begins with the assertion that our God is a creator god. Our world is not the result of some random collision of particles however many million years ago. It is the work and handiwork of God.

Of course, not everybody believes that. Stephen Hawking, the late great British physicist said this, "God may exist, but science can explain the universe without the need of a creator." Now, I'm not going to take issue with Professor Hawking on this and enter into a scientific debate but let me just say in passing that I don't think the discussion between science and religion is an either/or kind of discussion. I think it's perfectly possible to have a sensible belief in God and a firm belief too in science. Those things are not mutually contradictory, as evidenced by the very large number of scientists that we have in our congregation here at St. James.

To put it bluntly, I'm not talking here about the how of creation. I'm talking about the who. That's what's important. It is my firm belief that understanding the world as God's creation is extremely important, if not foundational, to an understanding of ourselves and life in general and our place in the world. The Psalmist says elsewhere that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. By contrast, Stephen Hawking again says this, and I quote. "We're mere collections of fundamental particles of nature."

Now that might well be true in one sense, but I think much is lost if we don't see ourselves as part of God's creation, as his creatures. Think of the difference

between the way we handle an unsolicited piece of junk mail that comes through our mailbox, which we might just toss in the garbage. And then if someone brings into the house, if a child brings a drawing that they've done at school. However primitive the drawing might be, we wouldn't throw it in the trash. We'd handle it. We'd ask questions about it. We'd be careful the way we touched it and dealt with it because we knew it had been thoughtfully made and created.

So it is with us. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. We are made and loved by God. If I think that I just happened into being, that I'm simply a random collection of molecules, well, then it would be very easy for me to see myself as sort of cut off, drifting in the midst of an anonymous universe, spattered by the randomness of fate.

But if I understand myself to be fearfully and wonderfully made, to be one of God's beloved creatures, then it's easier to see my life as having shape, sense, and purpose.

So having a belief in God as creator helps us to develop a sound understanding of ourselves. It informs a sensible understanding of the world. It encourages us for example, to understand the world as something through which the creator God communicates. The heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. As Saint Augustine said, "Some people in order to discover God read books. But there is a great book: the appearance of created things. Look above you. Look below you. Read it. God whom you want to discover never wrote that book with ink. Instead, he set before your eyes the things that he has made. Can you hear a louder voice than that?"

Our natural inclination is to exploit the world and its resources, to take. Instead, we should pause and pay attention to God's world and what the divine voice is proclaiming through creation. If you listened to the sermon last week, then you'll have heard me talking about stewardship, which is much on my mind at this moment, as we are about to enter our stewardship season. And I became conscious when preparing the sermon for today, that two principles of stewardship that I discussed last week also apply to the theme for today.

First, the realization that we are stewards, not owners of the world's resources. As Psalm 24 begins, "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it." It's God's creation. We

are the stewards. The earth is not ours to exploit. Rather in the words of the Book of Genesis, "It's for us to till and keep."

Our parish mission action plan identifies as an aim for the next five years that we might become better stewards of God's creation both in our parish and then wider afield. What we need is someone to champion that aim. And I'm asking, if anyone watching has an interest in the care of creation, then please let me know. I'd really like to talk to you about that. That's an important area of our life and work that I'd like to see us develop.

The second stewardship principle that I mentioned last week was strategic giving. That is using our resources with an eye to the future, to the coming kingdom. All three of the readings that we've heard today have this theme. They all encourage us to use our resources and to see our resources from the standpoint of eternity.

But I want to pick out the reading from Jeremiah, and to make sense of it, because it does look a rather odd thing to have stuck in the middle of the Hebrew scriptures there, but to make sense of it, why this property deal is significant, we need to see it in context.

Jeremiah does this deal in a very dark time in Israel's history. Jerusalem we're told is under siege. It's the darkest hour for them. The catastrophe, which Jeremiah has been predicting for many years throughout his ministry, is about to happen. The Babylonian army is literally camped around the walls of Jerusalem and they're getting ready for battle, a battle that they're bound to win. The people of Israel know they're going to lose and be taken into exile.

So, things look bad for the people. They look even worse for Jeremiah as he's been arrested and he's under armed guard at the Royal Palace. And yet when his cousin arrives, he does a deal with him to buy a field at Anathoth.

Now the people thought when they saw and heard about this, that Jeremiah was mad. What was he doing investing in the future? This for Jeremiah was a strategic investment. Jeremiah could see that as the reading ends, "Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land." No one else could see it, but Jeremiah could. And because of that, he invested in that future.

When I read this passage, the word that jumped out to me was the word besieged. In Jeremiah's day Jerusalem was besieged. I think we can know something in our own day about being besieged. We are besieged by bad news, by division. We're besieged by constant reminders of the world's fragility. And now we're besieged by the threat of a nuclear catastrophe.

But let us like Jeremiah, keep an eye on the future, which belongs to God. This is God's world. He is working his purposes out and he calls us as stewards of his creation to play our part in the building of the coming kingdom of God. Let's be sure to be good stewards, to play our part. Amen.