

Sunday 9th September 2012 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 & 9.30 a.m.		Stewardship – Creation Sunday (23rd Sunday of the Year B) Guide Sunday & Welcome of newcomers (9.30 a.m. service)
Genesis 1:24-31	Ps 8	Romans 8:18-25
		Matthew 6:25-33
Care for God's creation		

“And God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” (Gen 1:31)

It is wonderful to welcome our Girl Guides and their families here this morning: (Rangers); Guides, Brownies, Teddies; Guiders from Grahamstown and Port Alfred; Regional Commissioner from Port Elizabeth, Mrs Jean Kemp; Mrs Kaylene Brooks (Director, St Mary's Day Care Centre). You all look so smart in your uniforms; your colour party is impressive; we pray for you as you renew your Guide promises.

As part of Guide Sunday today, we acknowledge the work and contribution of Mrs Dorothy Holder, who has been a Guider for over 20 years. Dot, we thank you for your wonderful contribution to the life of the Guides over these past years. We pray God's blessing on you.

Welcome also to our newcomers who we shall be formally inducting as members of the Cathedral, today.

Stewardship

September is the month of spring; and in the life of the Cathedral September is Stewardship month, culminating in our Patronal Festival, when we rededicate to God our lives, our resources, our gifts and talents, so that we may be good stewards of all we have been given.

Stewardship is a big word. What does it mean? If I am a steward, it means I have been given something to care for, to look after. I may have been given a dog or a rabbit to look after, on behalf of the

family. Or - somebody has given me a particular responsibility, as a leader, for a time. I have been entrusted with these things, to look after them on behalf of somebody else. And as a steward, I shall be asked to give a report, to show how well I have looked after that which has been entrusted to me.

A farm manager is a steward, caring for the farm on behalf of the owner. A teacher who has a class to care for and to teach is a steward of those girls and boys on behalf of the community. A person in charge of a school hostel, a Girl Guider or Boy Scout leader, is a steward of those children and young people on behalf of their families.

Stewardship is what we do with our abilities and skills. It is how we use our finances, our money. It is how we care for our heritage, our history – how we heal the wounds of our past, how we become part of a redemptive journey which brings life out of death and good out of evil, and find a future together.

And it is how we care for and look after the world that God made: how we look after the environment, how we use the natural resources, how we care for the land, how we protect the powerless and the poor.

Theology of creation

What do Christians believe about creation? We believe that this is God's world. All that exists comes from the hand of God. "We believe in God the Father, who made the world." (The Baptismal Creed). "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it..." (Ps 24:1).

God has given us a world that is beautiful. "God looked on all that he had made and indeed, it was very good." (Gen 1:31).

We look on the wonder and the majesty and the savage raw beauty of it all, and we are overwhelmed. "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers: the moon and the stars that you have set in order, what is man that you should be mindful of him...?" (Ps 8:4-5).

We live in a world that continues to change and evolve and expand – the great continental shifts, old species dying off, new species evolving; huge natural forces at work – earthquakes, tsunamis, storms. We are part of a world that is interdependent. Global warming melts ice-bergs in the Arctic and causes climate change here in the Eastern Cape.

We believe that humankind has been given dominion over creation (Gen 1:28) – but this dominion is in the form of a sacred trust. We have to look after it as good stewards. Sadly, we are also part of a world that is hurting because of the abuse of creation by humankind: “the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains (Rom 8:22).

We believe that we can trust God to provide for our needs. “Do not worry... worry won’t add a day to your life... God will take care of you...” (Mt 6:25ff.)

Our care for all that has been made

So as good stewards of God’s creation, what are we called to do? I grew up on a farm, and so as well as the usual pets – dogs, budgies, white mice, hamsters, rabbits – I had turkeys, and a couple of muscovy ducks; we farmed sheep; we had geese as watchdogs; my sister had bantams. Here in Grahamstown people specialise in donkeys and cows and goats. So part of being good stewards is to care for our animals, to make sure that they have enough food and water, and get enough exercise. The 6th Guide Law is “A Guide is a friend to animals.” It is not right to keep a dog tied up all day, or put it in a tiny yard with nowhere to run. We should help and support the SPCA, and do all we can to prevent the poaching of wild animals, our rhinos, our whales. We don’t throw our papers and rubbish in the streets; we don’t allow water to run to waste; we fix leaking taps and burst pipes.

As families, as the church, as the community of Grahamstown, we can become eco-friendly, and later on in the service Kate Davies will speak briefly on how we can become an eco-church.

Being good stewards also means being part of the bigger debates. Two days ago, our government gave the go-ahead for fracking in the Karoo. It is about as rude as it sounds. I think that this is a misguided decision which, like the arms deal, will return to bite us. It might bring some short-term gain for a few, but at the expense of the long-term destruction of the Karoo water system.

Being good stewards means we must protect the powerless and the poor. It is not enough to be against fracking in the Karoo without doing something about the poverty of many who live there. We must be passionate about economic justice. The recent killings at Marikana have brought this to the fore-front for us all. We cannot have a few people – mine owners, trade union officials, those in government – getting very rich while others – mine workers – earn little, and many, too many, are unemployed and desperate.

Last week, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba visited Marikana and attended the talks between the various groups. He wrote, “As we drove away later... it was as if the land spoke deep in my soul, saying, ‘All is not well’. I could not help but fear that we are living in the calm before the storm. We are on a knife edge. The dire states of everything from living conditions to issues in the mining community are the stuff from which revulsion follows and revolution is too easily made... [T]his visit left me with the sense that this country is like a smouldering log that, left unattended, lies ready to ignite at the slightest wind.”¹

CONCLUSION

We have only one world. We have only one country. As we seek to care for creation, we do so knowing that the future is in our hands, but it is also in God’s hands. “Seek God’s kingdom and his justice before everything else, and all the rest will come to you as well.” (Mt 6:33)

¹ Statement, 6th September 2012