

2020-09-20 – Psalm 95:1-11 & John 10:22-30 –

The earth is the Lord's

Psalm 95

¹ Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

² Let us come before him with thanksgiving
and extol him with music and song.

³ For the LORD is the great God,
the great King above all gods.

⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the mountain peaks belong to him.

⁵ The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.

⁶ Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;

⁷ for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.

Today, if only you would hear his voice,

⁸ “Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah,
as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness,

⁹ where your ancestors tested me;
they tried me, though they had seen what I did.

¹⁰ For forty years I was angry with that generation;
I said, ‘They are a people whose hearts go astray,
and they have not known my ways.’

¹¹ So I declared on oath in my anger,
‘They shall never enter my rest.’”

John 10:22-30

²² Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon’s Colonnade. ²⁴ The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

²⁵ Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

As a child I didn’t have many possessions of my very own. We were not poor, and we had everything we needed, but I was not really that interested in ‘stuff’ and I am told that I was a difficult child to buy presents for. But I can clearly remember a few items that did really cherish, including a little knitted toy called ‘sailor boy’ when I was very young, a multi-tool that I got when I was in a phase of being into survival skills, and later on a very fashionable new turquoise bicycle and pannier set (and I still have the panniers, by the way).

On starting at secondary school aged 11, I had to have a hockey stick, and carefully chose one from a local sports shop, in Reading I think it was; the grain of the wood was beautiful, the

white and blue paint shiny where it was covered with a smooth glaze, the spiral of towelling at the top of the handle, neatly taped in place, soft and comfortable to hold. I was delighted with my new hockey stick and carefully took it with me on its first trip to school. On the way there, one of the older boys spotted me with my pride and joy and made a bee-line for me. Grabbing it from my hands he proceeded to swing it at imaginary hockey balls, and bash it around a bit. By the time I had my hockey stick returned to me it was dirty, dented and scuffed, a bit of the tape worked loose, irreparably scarred. I can't remember now whether I cried or whether I was able to control myself, but I was devastated.

Over the years, I have learnt to become less attached to or worried about material things. It is the way of the world for things to get damaged or stop working, and many things are more important. But that experience, and similar ones that I'm sure most of us have had, can be valuable in giving us insight into the relationship between God and the world. God loves and cares for the world and all that is in it, because the world *belongs* to him.

As Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it". As we can get a small sense of in our own experience, *God cares for that which is his own*.

When we look at the universe around us, from the vastness of the swirling galaxies above, to the tiniest creature we can see, the majestic mountain peaks and the very deepest oceans, we

see something of God's character – his creativity, his power, his concern for detail, his sense of fun and humour, even. God's handiwork reflects his character and his care for all that he has made, and when we experience the wonders of that creation, we should praise God for what he has done and for who he is.

The psalmist encourages us to sing and shout. Sadly that not currently permitted in our limited in-person services, but we can and should praise and give thanks to God in our hearts. Not only are we instructed to do so, but it is good for us to do so! Science tells us that grateful people are happy people, and our joy is deepened when it is expressed and shared. The atheist has no one to thank for the wonders of creation, or the blessings they experience. The Christian should turn their appreciation of wonders of the world back to praise to the creator *God who cares for that which is his own*.

We care for the things and people that belong to us. We are told in the psalm that God's people are like a flock of sheep under the care of a shepherd. It is a practical care of protection and provision. It is a care of saving from danger and even death. Jesus picks up this picture of the good shepherd caring for his sheep, even to the point of death. So precious are they to him, that not one of the sheep belonging to Jesus, given to him by the Father, will be lost.

Having spoken of the care of God for his people, like a flock of sheep brought to a place of good pasture, the psalm speaks of a time of disobedience and testing – at Meribah and Massah. This

refers to a time recorded in Exodus 17 when the pilgrim people of God found themselves in a waterless valley. Following their miraculous rescue from Egypt, they had more than enough evidence that God could be trusted to care and provide for them, but they turned from trust to doubt. God provided them with water from a rock – referred to at the beginning of the psalm – and so they were provided for once again, and saved from death. But still they persisted in their disobedience, wandered in the wilderness for a generation until they were permitted to enter the promised land. But even then the heart of God’s people remained rebellious and they were eventually exiled from that land. It is human nature to rebel against God, and to want to do things our own way.

But to receive the care of those who love us, we need to submit, to be obedient and to receive. For a child to be nourished or educated, they need humbly and obediently to receive the food or lessons given to them. When we are sick, to receive necessary medical treatment we need to submit to the “doctor’s orders”.

A few years ago I had laser surgery on my eyes. It was a procedure that I opted to have in order to significantly improve my vision, but in order for it to be successful I had to obediently submit to a rather challenging set of instructions and temporary limitations. There was a set of checks and measurements I had to have in the proceeding months, during the procedure itself I had to closely follow instructions and lie very still, and following

the operation I had to apply drops regularly, wear bulky eye protection, even at night, and not rub or even touch my eyes for several weeks. I followed all the instructions religiously – after all, the success of the operation and my future vision depended on it – and as a result of my humble obedience, all was well!

To benefit from the blessings of the one protecting, providing and caring for us, we need humble obedience. This is what it means to have faith or put our trust in that individual.

And the sooner we respond, the sooner we benefit. *God still cares for that which is his own*, and to receive the blessings that God offers to his people we need humble obedience. We need to hear his voice ‘today’ as it says in the Psalm. Jesus says that his sheep listen to his voice and follow him. They know and trust the shepherd, follow him, and find good pasture as a result.

Jesus told a story about a man who had a son who decided to leave the family home and fritter away his inheritance in wild living. Things go pear-shaped for him, and it is only after his hard heart is softened and he returns home that he experiences the joy and peace of being where he is truly meant to be and receive the care and love of the father. Things are only right again, when the care of the father is humbly received by the penitent son.

The whole of creation is set up to flourish when care is given and received. *God cares for that which is his own* and you and I,

made in the image of God, to be like God, are to love and care for one another and for all of creation. That blueprint for the flourishing of humanity and all of creation is set out in the early chapters of Genesis, and realised in the last few chapters of Revelation. In between those biblical 'bookends' we learn how *God cares for that which is his own*, calling and saving a people from amongst the nations, like a shepherd guiding a flock to good pasture, and from that chosen people raising up a shepherd who will expand that flock to include people from all nations. *God cares for that which is his own* and teaches his own people to care for one another and his precious creation. It is part of our mission to become more like God to care in this way.

And as that care is expressed and expanded, God's kingdom comes. People experience and respond in loving obedience to the loving care of God expressed through his people.

Relationships are mended, souls are healed, the vulnerable are protected, the world is cared for, injustices are righted, and harmony is restored.

God cares for that which is his own. He cares for you and he cares for me. Let us respond to that care in humble obedience, caring in turn for one another, and for the wonderful, precious creation that belongs to our Lord and Maker.

Revd Dr Jonathan Mobey
20 September 2020