

God's voice through creation

When I go into someone's house for the first time, I often can't resist having a look at what's on their bookshelves. Largely just because I find books fascinating. But a spin-off is that the bookshelf will tell me a bit about the person's interests.

As do the pictures on the wall, the framed photographs, the CD rack. The people who live there have made it their home, so the stuff in it reflects what matters to them.

Similarly, nature reflects what matters to God. The Psalm we heard lays it on quite thick: "The skies proclaim God's handiwork; day after day they pour forth speech" - as if to say, they can't stop talking. The New Testament says that everyone in any age, in any culture, can know something of God through "what has been made", in other words, creation. And the Greek word for 'what has been made' is *POEMIA*, from which we get the word poem. In other words, creation is God's poem.

Martha talked last week about God's awesomeness, and today we'll look at different parts of God's poem: so can I invite you to come on a little virtual walk with me.

The first place we'll go is Michael and Ann Maughan's garden: in the summer, it is vibrant with colour. I was going to say a riot of colour, but it's too beautifully organised to be a riot. It's alive with colour.

I'm not a scientist, but I'm always fascinated by the fact that we have colour. Neuroscientists tell us that strictly speaking, there is no such thing as colour. Objects don't have a colour. It's just our eyes dividing things up into colour. But thank God for colour. What a dull world it would be without it. We love the way the colours interact. It's because of colour that we love rainbows and sunsets.

All that suggests to me that God wants us not just to make use of but to enjoy his creation. **God wants us to enjoy his gifts. That's a message from nature.**

Let's now go for a walk through the Wotton Estate: dense coniferous woodland.

I gather that scientists increasingly recognise that, contrary to what people used to think, trees co-operate with and support each other.

In a normal woodland, where trees of the same type are reasonably close together, they are connected to each other through underground fungal networks. Trees share water and nutrients with each other through these networks that have been nicknamed the 'wood wide web'. These networks will also be used by one tree to send distress signals about disease or insect attacks, alerting the other trees.

A quick detour from Wotton to Sub-Saharan Africa, where when a giraffe starts munching on an acacia tree, the tree will feel the attack and the damage and will give

off a distress signal in the form of a gas. This gas won't deter the giraffe one bit or help that acacia tree one bit, but it does alert other acacia trees in the vicinity. These trees will immediately start pumping tannins into their leaves, which makes them far less tasty and can make a giraffe very sick indeed.

God's longing for us to co-operate and support each other is there in nature.

Let's forget plants for a bit and stop by at *Green Gables*, where there are some honey bees. The older worker bees that act as guards at the entrance to the hive will attack and sting anything they consider a danger to the hive. This will almost certainly result in their own death, as they can't retract their barbed sting. But although some of those bees will lose their lives while guarding the colony, it means the rest of the hive is safe. Sacrifice of oneself is written into nature.

As a kind of aside, I was fascinated to read that dolphin babies stay awake for a full month after birth, so their mother at considerable cost stays awake with them. Some of you may be thinking that it's much the same for humans, but I don't think we go a month without any sleep at all! **The sacrifice of love is part of the poem of nature.** That also points quietly to *God Himself*, as every communion service is a celebration of Jesus' sacrifice of love.

Finally, I invite you into the Rectory garden, where - to the embarrassment of the current tenant - we'll notice that some of last year's dead autumn leaves have still not been cleared. But that aside, dead leaves play a vital role in the ecosystem. Dead leaves give nutrients, and that enables new life to emerge. Death leads to new life.

But you might also notice that the one thing that is done conscientiously in the Rectory garden is dead-heading. A bit dies, you cut it off and that in a very short space of time this encourages new buds and new life. And then of course there is the example Jesus took of the seed falling to the ground, only to produce new life.

The Resurrection, death leading to new life, is strongly present in the poem that is creation.

Going back to the Psalm, it continues "the skies use no words, yet their voice goes out into all the earth". Albert Einstein was not a Christian believer, but he clearly heard that voice, because as he looked at the wonders of the universe, he was certain there was a Creator.

God's longing for us to enjoy, our need to support each other, the sacrifice and resurrection that are Easter are just some of the messages in *God's poem*. When you look around at this poem this creation, what else do you notice, what else does God reveal to you?