

Readings St Andrew's on The Terrace Sunday 1 September Creation 1 Ocean Sunday

Readings for the Reflection

Hebrew Bible

The Beginning

Genesis 1: 1-10

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty,

darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light," ***and there was light.***

God saw that the light was good, and separated the light from the darkness.

God called the light "day," and the darkness "night." and there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water."

So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it.

And it was so. God called the vault "sky."

And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear."

And it was so. God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters "seas."

And God saw that it was good.

Contemporary reading

"I brought.."

by @wildcaughtword

I brought what burdened me to the ocean

Placed it down

Stepped back

And allowed the tide to take it

Reflection for the Gathering

In the creation story, the seas are defined as being *not* dry land. The oceans are far more than what they are not, however. They are a realm unto themselves, with teeming life, exotic landscapes, rivers of currents cycling within them, boundaries on multiple sides. They are a whole world of excitement and beauty. Adventure lies within and upon them.

Frequently, more in the past than now, human beings braved the mystery of the seemingly limitless oceans. Initial western explorers travelled for the plunder they hoped to be in exotic far off lands, genuinely not knowing whether there would come a cliff edge to this wide, wide sea over which they would drop off into the abyss. Indigenous people followed wind and tides and currents and birdlife to new lands far from their island homes, also travelling into unknown territory, away from security and home, but also sometimes away from burgeoning populations and inter-tribal strife.

Immigrants crossed the seas from home to another place, expecting freedom and a fresh start; sometimes finding it, but also finding disappointment and a yearning for home the depth of which they maybe had not quite expected.

Some were forced to travel seaward, convicts and slaves deported under the control of others under cruel conditions.

Then there are those who choose to take a sea voyage for pleasure and or to sail in competition, pitting themselves against the elements and the broad width of this blue planet. Most recently, goods are exchanged by sea on ungainly container ships, long and cumbersome, requiring new ports to be built to accommodate their size and shape; others make their living by what they can harvest from the formerly abundant life within the sea, enduring bad weather and long days away from home; while still others make their living on the high seas by piracy and people smuggling. Even on this broad watery expanse which has a life and a mind of its own, human beings have found a way to control and manipulate, to harm and to rob.

The sea is many things to many people from poorly paid fishing crew to the container ship captain to the skipper of a container vessel to the owner of a mega yacht to a round-the-world solo sailor to the small child tooling her way around coastal bays in her starter-size dinghy.

And all that is on the surface. Below “dragons be here” – from huge whales down to tiny krill and microscopic plankton. Graceful dolphins to brittle coral, colourful tropical fish to wandering stingrays. Underwater coral gardens and seaweed forests, shoals and atolls, underwater volcanoes and lengthy trenches, deep ridges and silver sand. A bright, beautiful, blue world of unique type and personality.

Symbolically, the oceans call to us. Their waters are the primeval womb from whence we came, human-kind being birthed eventually from that first fish which struggled ashore and found breathing air was not an impossibility. We are the offspring of these mighty seas of the primordial soup which they once were. The ocean is our archetypal amniotic fluid, you could say. So we are pulled towards its sight and sound, the beating of waves on the shore, the pulse of the universe as it were, the heartbeat of all life as we know it.

The idea of sinking back into the ocean’s watery embrace is a symbol to us of surrendering to something greater than ourselves. It can represent for us an ocean of love, everlasting and neverending. Just as the sea can lap at two different and opposite shores and yet not develop a hole in the middle – a fascination to me when I was young), symbolises that love is within end, without deficiency, always present, wrapping us round.

Ocean Sunday today could be called the calm before the storm, as the Parish Councillors next week have chosen Storm Sunday, so the storms are yet to come – next week. For to paint the oceans as always calm always accepting, always benign is to misname them of course, for like human beings the ocean has its moods, its rip tides and periods of wild, erratic behaviour.

But I am deliberately dwelling on the seas’ great capacity, its stunning beauty and its symbolic primeval meaning for us because we need to consider that what we are doing to the oceans, when we treat them as the world’s rubbish dump, we are doing to our mother.

Like many of you as a child, I knew there was parts of several NZ beaches where one didn’t swim because of the sewer outfall being close by. I didn’t think much then about what a sewer outfall meant in real terms or what it might do to the delicate ecosystem below the waves. That’s the thing about the sea, a lot of life as well as a lot of damage can be going on underneath, but the surface remains opaque and unrevealing. You could say the ocean has a good poker face.

And oceans are so vast, I guess we figured the dilution factor would take over and even concentrated human sewage running out into the bay would float away and not be a problem to us, (even if maybe somewhere else.)

And the gyres spinning in the north Pacific Ocean where oceans currents meet in a circular motion is out of sight and out of mind most of the time for most people.

Now we know more, however, we are no longer innocents wandering in a beautiful Ocean of Eden. We know of the existence of great garbage patches in the ocean. This ocean which is the womb of life. The gyre itself is not the problem, it is what it catches within it.

This is a description I have found:

Ocean gyres circle large areas of stationary, calm water. Debris drifts into these areas and, due to the region’s lack of movement, can accumulate for years. These regions are called garbage patches. The Indian Ocean, North Atlantic Ocean, and North Pacific Ocean all have significant

garbage patches. The garbage patch in the North Pacific Ocean is sometimes called the Pacific trash vortex or the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

Garbage patches are created slowly. Marine debris makes its way into the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, for instance, from currents flowing along the west coast of North America and the east coast of Asia. Some of the debris is also dumped from ocean vessels.

The circular motion of the gyre draws in the debris, mostly small particles of plastic. Eventually, the debris makes its way to the centre of the gyre, where it becomes trapped and breaks down into a kind of plastic soup.

Oceanographers and ecologists are concerned about garbage patches. In particular, they are studying the degradation, or breaking down, of plastics. Unlike natural substances, such as wood or metal, plastic does not disintegrate into organic substances. It simply breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces of plastic. These tiny plastic particles are as small as the algae and plankton that form the basis of the entire ocean food web. Species such as shrimp, birds, and fish consume these micro-plastics, which oftentimes kill them. The plastic chemicals can also be absorbed by predators of these species. The concentration of these chemicals increases through each trophic level of the food chain, a process known as biomagnification.¹

If you didn't know the details, you probably already knew the substance of this information.

Regarding the ocean as an object for our use and pleasure is not treating it with the care and definition shown in the creation story. There the waters were carefully separated from the dry land and given a name. When we name something, we give it significance, importance, status. We create a relationship with it, it becomes real to us. That is why we have personal names and are not called by generic labels like 'kid', or 'baby' or 'child'. The seas were named and so they were signalled as important as any other element of creation.

If the oceans have the status of mother to the human race, why would we resist spending money on sewage systems to treat effluent, systems to prevent nutrient runoff, regulations on the disposal of trash at sea? Wouldn't we treat our biological mothers and fathers well? Why not this watery parent of ours?

We are privileged here in Wellington. The sea forms the focal point of our life, giving beautiful sea views, changing moods, constant inspiration and brings in tourist dollars too. Ferry services plying its surface connect us to the mainland. To our delight, whales and sealions still occasionally take sanctuary here. How are we returning the compliment and giving back in positive and life-giving ways?

In the ancient story from Genesis 1, the divine creative moment is described as "And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters "seas." And God saw that it was good. The divine saw that our earth was good.

May the oceans always be something we can see as good.
Too good to spoil;
Good and healthy because we have worked to make them so.

We need to weep tears over our oceans,
to lament what human thoughtlessness and greed has done to them.

¹ <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/ocean-gyre/>

Then we need to sweat over methods and remedies to prevent further desecration of this companion of ours on this small planet

We need to sweat the sweat of honest toil as we take action to save our seas.

There are three kinds of water, tears, sweat and salt-water
all are salty and all are needed,
our tears and our sweat are needed to keep our saltwater oceans clean.

Let us be not destroyers but co-creators
So then we may be able to look at the oceans of the world
decades from now
and still be able to say "it is good".

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