

May I speak in the name of the Living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

There is a long tradition of celebrating the brining in of the harvest at the end of September or beginning of October... as we declared in the words of our opening hymn... *“all is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin; God our maker doth provide for our wants to be supplied; come to God’s own temple come; raise the song of harvest-home!”*

In an uncertain and changing world, it is good each year at Harvest time to give thanks to God for his faithfulness and many blessings to us in creation. A large part of our celebration today, is about giving thanks to God for the food and water that sustains us and helps us to grow well and strong. It is about saying thank you for all his gifts in creation – and especially of course the gift of life itself.

It is God who has made us, it is in him that we live and move and have our being.

One of the privileges I have as Vicar of this Church is going into the local schools to share in times of worship, during their assemblies.

This term, the children at St Peter's School are looking at the theme of Creation.

When I was leading worship in the school last Thursday, I showed them a photomosaic puzzle of the world viewed from space. The picture of the earth is made up of 10,000 small puzzle pieces, each with a small individual picture on it, of a place, a landscape, an animal or people. Put together, they make up the picture of the world.

We do indeed live in a beautiful world, made up of many different landscapes, places and peoples. They are all interconnected and depend on each other for life and wellbeing.

During this term in school, the children are looking at the Biblical references to God's creative power. The account of Creation in Genesis and the songs in the Psalms celebrating God's love for all that he has made.

All of them acknowledging that all life ultimately comes from God.

I shared with the children, a modern poem celebrating God's love in creation, from this book "Psalms from Down Under." It's called "Psalms from Down Under," because it was written by Joy Cowley, who lives in New Zealand.

I'd like to share it with you: READ POEM.

I think it is a very beautiful modern expression of the fundamental belief that all life comes from God.

Very importantly, the poem also echoes the account of Creation in the Book of Genesis - both make it clear that God has created human beings for a very special purpose, to share with him in caring for all that he has made.

As the poem expresses it: *"God danced two people into being, he named them Woman and Man. She sang to them, "My children, join me in creation. Come and be my partners dancing the dance of love."*

In the time of worship with the children, I asked the question "How good are we at doing that?"

The sad fact is, that human beings do many things which damage the world in which we live. We cut down trees more quickly than they can be replaced; we take too much water out of the rivers, leaving many areas of the world as parched deserts; we over fish the oceans depleting fish stocks; we burn fossil fuels which produce the gases which are changing our climate and destroying habitats for many wild animals; let alone endangering the existence of some rural communities in the poorest regions of the world.

As a result of all of this, a recent scientific report showed that in only the last 40 years, populations of mammals, birds, reptiles amphibians and fish have reduced by an average of 52%.

We graphically demonstrated this in worship at the school, by getting all the children to stand up – representing all the wild animals in the world. Then, half the children sat down, showing the way in which numbers had gone down during the last 40 years.

Within these overall figures, some animals have been even more badly affected.

Over the last 100 years,

Lions in one part of Africa have decline 90%

Tigers have reduced from 100,000 to just 3,000

Elephants have gone down from 100,000 to only 2,000

But, it is not all doom and gloom.

During the past 40 years the number of Mauritian Kestrels has dramatically increased.

They have risen from just 2 pairs to 250 today.

Alongside celebrating God's love in creation, and alongside thanksgiving and praise at Harvest, we also have the opportunity to reflect upon the way we use the resources that God gives us, both as individuals and as a world community. To reflect on how well we are fulfilling our God given role as stewards of creation.

A growing understanding of the impact of human activity on the depletion of the earth's resources and in bringing about climate change, is gradually leading to a rediscovery of our responsibility as stewards of creation.

With the children, we thought about practical ways in which we can help:

By supporting organisations such as the WWF for Nature, who do so much to raise awareness and put into place schemes to help protect endangered habitats and species.

We can all help, by thinking about the ways in which we use water, electricity, and recycle paper, card and plastics.

As we rejoice again in God's great faithfulness this Harvest time, may we also re-affirm our commitment as stewards of creation, to working for a wiser use of the earth's resources; and each sow a seed of hope for the future, so that all peoples may truly rejoice in God's love and goodness.

I would like to end with the traditional Collect Prayer for Harvest which reflects very well these dual aspects of harvest thanksgiving:

*Eternal God,
you crown the year with your goodness
and give us the fruits of the earth in their due season:
grant that we may use them to your glory,
for the relief of those in need and for our own well-being;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*