

High St Uniting Church Frankston

Creation and us

Romans 8:15 - 25



For 20 years or so, Paul had been traveling around the eastern end of the Mediterranean planting and nurturing communities in the name of Jesus Christ, as far as Athens and Corinth. Now his dreams and visions stretched to the west. If he could get a supportive base in Rome, then he could journey as far as Spain. But there is something powerful in that little word 'if'. Paul knew of the Christian communities in Rome, his friends from Corinth, Prisca and Aquila, were among the Jews expelled from Rome. They had

returned there when allowed and formed a bit of a connection. But the Christians in Rome only knew of Paul by reputation; a reputation no doubt coloured by his Pharisee background and his run-ins with the Roman authorities. This letter that he writes to Rome is not just an introduction, it's an explanation of what he believed and what he preached and taught. An explanation that goes from the very basics of religious philosophy through to practical living of the faith.

The live issue of the tensions between the Jewish origins of the faith and the obviously non-Jewish composition of the Near East and European world in early Christian communities had played out several times in Paul's life and in his letters. We have the wonderful passage in Galatians:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

And it features very prominently in the letter to Rome, as if he is answering unasked criticism. Yes, I am a Jew, trained in scripture and the Law, yes, I agree that Jews have a special connection to God, and yes, I grieve that many of my Jewish compatriots have not accepted Jesus as the Messiah, but the Gospel is bigger and more important than all of that. In finding a new argument to unite the cultures and differences in communities of faith, Paul infers, particularly in chapter 8, that our little conflicts about culture and race and status are nothing compared to the creation wide wonders of the love of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul was talking about the inner turmoil of the battle of good and evil within all of us and our communities when he wrote 'our present sufferings', but when we read that phrase in a passage that mentions creation, our minds naturally go to climate change, natural disasters, environmental degradation, species loss and drought and famine. We know what it means to see the whole creation groaning. And it's hard to look past that to see what else Paul is trying to tell us. Paul says, 'the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed'. Paul is saying that our faithfulness, our response to the grace of God in Jesus Christ, is so much bigger and more important than our little clashes and competitions about culture and race. Are we revealing to the world what it means to be the children of God, or are we just revealing another religion? There is only one God of all creation and our response to God, our behaviour as people of faith, is tied to the fate of the whole creation. Instead of worrying about race or culture or social status or religious matters, concern yourself with responding to the grace of God in Jesus Christ with love for the world.

Paul knew his scripture and he is not just referencing the story of Adam, and the curse on the land from Adam's rejection of God, when he connects people with creation, but also the words of the prophet Hosea who also personified the land when he tied the behaviour of the people with the health of the land. Hosea wasn't calling out wrong worship styles, or bad sacrifices, he was calling out lying and murder, stealing and adultery, breaking the bounds of what is right behaviour. Obedience to the will of God in honesty, mercy, compassion, love, and justice affects creation. Hear the cries and groans of creation and do all you can to address the damage that our lifestyle and culture has on the world, but also look to how faithfully we are revealing the lives, words, and actions that come with truly being children of God. In practical terms that means not just considering how you deal with consumption, recycling, energy use, and waste, but also how do we as a community, locally, regionally, nationally, handle our statements, our investments, our properties, and our ministries.

Paul's letter to the communities in Rome didn't fulfil its purpose; he only got to Rome as a prisoner and never set out for Spain. But the letter outlived him and stands as the great exposition of our faith, with passages that find new meaning and purpose with each generation. I hope you enjoy looking through the handout with the favourite passages, and you may have some that are not in the handout. This letter of Paul's is a great theological exposition, but at its heart it's a call to live out the faith in practical ways of love, compassion, mercy, and justice. Amen