

## September Reflection

### God, Community and Creation - Humanity in the Image of God

September marks step four in our pilgrimage of hope – alone and in community. It also sees the beginning of the Season of Creation. At first glance they may appear not to be related, but as I pondered both I realised that there is a common link:

*“Then God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over the creatures that move along the ground.’ (Genesis 1:26, TNIV)*

Humanity was created in the image of a Triune, relational God. Over the years theologians have debated what does it mean to be created in the image of God. Since the time of the reformation, the most favoured viewpoint has been what is known as the relational viewpoint. This viewpoint believes that one of the distinct characteristics of the Trinity is the eternal relationship that Father, Son, and Spirit have enjoyed. Just as the Triune God is not a solitary figure, so humans reflect the image not in social isolation, but as they relate to one another.

*Saint Augustine once wrote that **“the hearts of humans are restless until they find their place in God.”***

*Reflect on this statement. What do you think this means for you?*

Proponents of this viewpoint do not see the image of God as something that resides within humans but more as an ability to experience relationship. Respected theologian, Millard Erickson suggests that humans cannot be humans by

*Reflect on Karl Barth’s statement for a while – that as humans we relate to God on a vertical plain and to each other on a horizontal plain. How does this look in your life?*

*In what ways has community blessed your life?*

themselves. We need an “other” to relate to. Swiss theologian, Karl Barth, described this ability to relate as possessing a vertical plain, where humans relate to God, and a horizontal plain, where humans relate towards each other. We were created for community – to share our experiences with those around us, for as

we do so, we can stir up a greater sense of hope and encouragement in others, as they stir them in us.

We also know that there are times when we will be alone and maybe even lonely. Even when our heart may tell us we are alone, we know that the truth is we are never totally alone - we are always accompanied by God. As the psalmist writes *“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence” (Psalm 139:7, NIV).*

And, in some respects, those seasons of aloneness, are just as important for us. John Mark Comer, in his book, *Practicing the Way* (2024) writes:

*“When you read the four biographies of Jesus in the New Testament, one thing is painfully clear: Jesus’ life template was based on a rhythm of retreat and return, like breathing in and then out.*

*Jesus would retreat: He would slip away from the noise and press of the crowd and find a place where he could pray, alone or sometimes with a few very close friends. He*

*would inhale. Then he would exhale, or return: He would come back to preach and teach and heal and deliver and offer love.” (p.57).*

Can you see this pattern of retreat and return, as modelled by Jesus, in your own life? How important are those “alone” times for you?

But there is more. To be in the image of God is a not a noun, but a verb – it is something we do, not something we are. We are therefore called to represent God in all of creation, caring for it as



*St Francis in Creation (acrylic by Nancy Earle, SMIC). Used with artist’s permission*

What stirs in you as you gaze upon this painting?

He cares for us. We know that God cares for creation – Psalm 104 informs us of that care – and we know He takes delight in His creation – in Job 38 and 39, God describes His creation with such pride. Sadly, we have not done a great job of caring as God cares.

Creation can point us towards God. We are to live in community, but we can also seek God alone in His creation. If you can, you may like to watch this video clip “If the Earth was a Golfball” by Ps Louie Giglio,

([https://youtu.be/D37UtbViKRw?si=inFXbQ7WM1\\_kjllU](https://youtu.be/D37UtbViKRw?si=inFXbQ7WM1_kjllU)). In it he presents some perspective on our planet Earth and its position within the galaxy and beyond. But remember, the God who spoke the universe into being, is also the same God who knows every detail of our lives (Psalm 139:1-6; John 10:3).

Each new day brings with it new opportunities, new hope, new mercies. As we journey through life, we are surrounded by a glorious creation that, in its own way, seeks to connect with us, crying out to us. May we have ears to hear, eyes to see and hearts to feel and respond.

*What is one thing you can do to respond to the cry of the earth?*

A song that you might enjoy: <https://youtu.be/9uRBM-RxLnE?si=THjcuJfg51XQcET1>



*"Sunrise at Mt Egerton, Victoria", August 2025 (used with permission)*

**A Prayer in Communion with Creation by Teresa Berger, Professor em. of Liturgical Studies, Yale**

*"Creator God, mystery of love that sustains the universe: In the beginning, you called forth all that is. To this day, you accompany your creation on its journey through time. All you have created rightly gives you praise. We join our voices with the sublime choir of creation that ceaselessly sings your praise. With all that exists, we worship you, the giver of life, and fountain of all flourishing. We confess, before you and all creation, that we have not always mirrored your care for your world. We lament the wounds we have inflicted on the earth community and commit ourselves to changing our ways. Send out your Spirit, Creator God, and renew the face of your earth. Renew in us deep love and care for creation, so that we may join with its countless voices in singing your praise. Amen.*