

SUSTAINABLE SEPTEMBER 2017

WEEK 2

STUDY NOTES

A City's description as a 'concrete jungle' conjures up images of technology, modernity, productivity, and progress. However, the injection of bitumen, steel, glass and concrete into a space, with a tandem reduction in trees and vegetation can lead to what is known as 'urban heat island'. In short, an urban area that is significantly warmer than surrounding areas owing to the modification of land surfaces. This phenomenon in the Australian context has been reported on in recent years^{1 2}. There can be a temperature variance of up to 10° Celsius in a highly localised area, arising principally from a lack of tree canopy cover and other natural cooling methods, amongst other causes. Reflecting on this reality and addressing the physical practicalities of the restoration and creation of urban forests is essential. This work is further benefited by integrating it with an underlying theology exploring God's relationship with creation, thus grounding it in the search for a wholistic wellbeing for people and the environs in which we live.

ROMANS 13. 1-10

The phenomenon given brief detail above gives added impetus to the creation of urban green spaces, as well as the preservation of natural reserves. Sometimes, thankfully, local reserves are large enough to reflect something of their original character – they house native animals, the air has a noticeably different character that is sweeter having been infused with the aroma of various flora. Furthermore, in recent years there has been a reconnection with the natural environment through such initiatives as 'nature play'. This resonates with people seeking to reconnect with their creatureliness and createdness by enjoying a tangible and tactile experience of connectedness with more fundamental parts of God's good creation.

Progress in society has been made on many fronts, and we should give thanks for many of the developments which have been life-giving, whether they be in transport, medicine, education, farming, infrastructure or whatever else. We would do well to keep in mind however, an awareness of the costs of such development - the damage to natural-capital

¹ <http://www.news.com.au/technology/environment/heat-is-being-trapped-in-australia-cities-causing-them-to-become-hot-boxes/news-story/eff52876e011fa1ad0d67aa97e3db34c>

² <http://www.watoday.com.au/wa-news/research-reveals-perths-hottest-real-estate-in-terms-of-tree-cover-20150915-gjn834.html>

in order to build up capital of the more commonly regarded type. It is one thing to enjoy the results of such a trade-off, whether that be in abundant food, readily available technology, or well-maintained paths and roadways, but we should keep mindful of the sourcing of the various trappings of modern life.

An old episode of 'The Simpsons' comes to mind, of a futuristic society in which there stands a tree in a town centre which starts to flicker and we realise it is a hologram, and the plaque at its base reads 'in memory of a real tree'.

In Romans 13.1-10, there are some potentially serious implications for a civic context such as ours, where a lot of the care of parks, landscapes and reserves is measured against the benefits of other types of development such as mining and housing developments by public authorities. If we take Paul's words from his letter to the church at Rome at face value, any kind of human government, democratic, autocratic, or tyrannical, may claim legitimacy and demand just obedience from their citizens. A few points can help clarify this text, and its implications for us.

Paul's statement about political authority coming from God was not new, it echoed similar assertions made during the dispersion of Hebrew people under the rule of the Assyrians and Babylonians (cf. Isaiah 10.5-10; Jeremiah 27.4-8). It may not help ease actual persecutions, but believing in the God of *all*, who *all* are ultimately accountable to, means that those rulers in power are also subject to God. Furthermore, Paul believed that God's kingdom was imminent, with the end-days having been inaugurated with the death and resurrection of Christ. Reading Romans 13 in that light, it is hardly surprising that no long-term plan was made in terms of how Christians should relate to the civic authorities. Set into a broader context (Romans 12.14-13.10), we could further deduce that the exhortation is intended in a large way to discourage Christians from violent resistance against Rome³. We cannot take Paul's words as being a comprehensive treatise on the relation of Christians to civil governments. Moreover, our faith in the God who is creator of all gives us good reason for our faith to speak into every kind of situation, knowing that God cares deeply for our life on earth. Our belief and trust in God who creates, redeems and sanctifies all, and who engages with us constantly in life through everyday things, be they bread, wine, water, or any other part of the natural order, helps us be attuned to nature with eyes to see how human sinfulness can inflict disorder. Our propensity for

³ Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The First Paul: Reclaiming the Radical Visionary Behind the Church's Conservative Icon*, (New York, HarperOne), 120.

hubris and striving after myriad types of progress without sufficient regard to corresponding costs can be life threatening. Simple parts of life - trees, vegetation, water – can be so disrupted by our daily living, we don't realise the pressure we are under by damage done until we start to sweat, literally. Our calling to be God's people, and to speak God's love and life in the world means we have a duty, whilst holding to Christ's peace, to protest anything which destroys, degrades and lessens the life in the world that God has ordered.

INTERCESSIONS

God our creator, we give you thanks and praise for this world, our home, for its wondrous order and cycles of life, death and rebirth, and its awe-inspiring beauty even in chaos. We pray for our eyes to continually be attuned to see your glory in all creation, your creative word ever at work. We also pray for those whose lives are dedicated to the preservation and care of this earth, its land, seas, and air, and ask that you bless them in strength and wisdom in all that they do.

God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

God our redeemer, we give thanks for your Son, Jesus Christ, and that by his incarnation you show us your care for this world and all things in it. We ask that by your in-dwelling Spirit in all of us our use of the materials of this world will be reverent, and bring glory to you, from whose hand we have first received. Lord help us in our communities to be wise in the use of the things of this earth, to turn from callous waste and destruction, and to look to the renewal of our cities, towns, and landscapes.

God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

God, sanctifier of all, we give thanks for the community of your church, and its charge in mission that by its word and action we are to serve Jesus Christ our Lord. We pray for all parishes in this Diocese, your church in this nation, and the worldwide communion of which we are a part – that by our worship of you we may then be sent out in power to proclaim your Kingdom. Lord give us hearts and minds to discern your will, to be open to the movement of your Spirit, and courageous in following where you lead us. God, grant us vision and strength in speaking into situations of injustice and degradation, that our stewardship of your gifts to us may be hallowed.

God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

God, source of all our hope, we pray for those sick in mind, body and spirit. Grant healing and wholeness to those in need, and we hold up to you in prayer those on our hearts known to us especially... You know our needs before we ask, Lord, and ask that your Spirit pray in us for those things we truly need – help to relinquish and change that which harms us and your world, and receptiveness to embrace the transformation you call forth in us. God, we also pray for your faithful of every age, remembering with gratitude the lives of those who have gone before us and inspired us and others on the great pilgrimage of faith. Our Father, we commend to you all who now rest in your nearer presence. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

Let all Creation Dance – TiS 187

Almighty God, lift up our eyes – TiS 615

Come, O God of all the earth – TiS 181

O day of God, draw near – TiS 616