



World Federation Day 2019  
(Venue: Darlington)



# Water for Life, Water of Life:

(based on Sustainable Development Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation)

## BIBLE STUDY

Reflecting on the theology that underpins our thinking and action around the day's theme. (Jude Simms)

### Introduction

Water features large in God's creation plan, taking centre stage in four of the six days of creation.

**Genesis 1:1-2** (Day 1 – God creates heavens and earth; God's spirit hovers over the water)

Right at the beginning, there was water, and spirit [or breath, or power] – and not just any spirit [breath, power], but GOD'S. The spirit was moving [or hovering, or brooding] over the water – waiting, anticipating something new, longing to give birth. The significance of water is right there, in the beginning, the very essence of creation.

**Genesis 1:7** (Day 2 – God separates the waters)

Suggests water is an essential element not just in the earthly/human realm, but also in the heavenly/divine realm. In practical/ecological terms – the ongoing cycle of water between earth and sky that enables excess water to evaporate and rain to fall.

**Genesis 1:9-10** (Day 3 – God gathers the water, and dry land appears)

Not making dry land by shoving the water out of the way; not removing a nuisance; not creating one thing at the expense of another. God gathers one and forms the other, and names both, as of equal importance. There is an explicit creative intention in the way God acts.

**Genesis 1:20-21** (Day 5 – God fills the water with living creatures)

Water was the first element to be filled with life, and it was teeming/swarming – abundance of life, no less than the earth and the sky. Water is given the same variety and diversity of life, the same importance *for* life.

Water – fundamental; crucial to the creative activity of God; essence of creation, new birth, life itself.

Without water, creation crumbles: failed rains, rising sea-levels, melting ice caps, polluted or inaccessible water, deforestation, land erosion, flooding, exhausted/unproductive land, human tragedies – drought, sickness, starvation.

### 1. Ownership

Genesis 1:1 Psalm 24:1 Deuteronomy 10:14 Leviticus 25:23

God 'owns' creation, we are merely tenants – not a popular idea in a consumer-driven world.

Disney's *Pocahontas*: "You think you own whatever land you land on; the earth is just a dead thing you can claim." Replace 'land' and 'earth' with the word 'water'... Who owns what? What is 'up for grabs'? What can we buy and sell? And who's taking advantage of that?

Pope Benedict: "The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any higher instance than ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves." <sup>1</sup>

Pope Francis: "It is... conceivable that the control of water by large multinational businesses may become a major source of conflict in this century." <sup>2</sup>

One of the biggest threats to attaining SDG 6 is the 'privatisation' or 'ownership' of water – but it's nothing new:

Genesis 26:17-22 Isaac digs two wells, but others claim "the water is ours". Digs a third, and calls it 'Re-hoboth' ('broad space'): God has provided for the people, and there is room for all.

Toddler Property Laws: 1. If I like it, it's mine; 2. If it's in my hand, it's mine; 3. If I can take it from you, it's mine; 4. If I had it a little while ago, it's mine; 5. If it's mine, it must never appear to be yours in any way; 6. If I'm building something, all the pieces are mine; 7. If it looks just like mine, it is mine; 8. If I saw it first, it's mine; 9. If you are playing with it and you put it down, it becomes mine.

Amusing – but sobering if you replace 'it' with 'water', 'land', 'property', 'dignity', 'health'...

Number 10 – humanity's attitude towards God as the 'owner' of creation: 10. If it's broken, it's yours!

### 2. Stewardship

Genesis 1:26-28 (Day 6 – God creates human beings – to 'subdue' the earth and have 'dominion')

Negatively – conquest, oppression. But – positive definitions of 'subdue':

to master: like an apprentice – learning with care and patience to do a job well;

to hold in check / contain: like a gardener – keeping the weeds down, not letting one thing take over;

to control / govern: like raising a child – care, nurture and discipline, to ensure they follow a good path to maturity;

to moderate: exams – ensuring fairness/order; dispute – mediate/arbitrate to bring things to a good resolution.

Stewardship: oversight and protection of something considered worth caring for and preserving.

Steward: a surrogate [representative] of another

Middle Ages: manager of manorial household, ensuring well-being of property and people

Colossians 1:16-17 "...by God all things were created..." but "...*in God* all things hold together." Without God – literally (God's presence in creation), spiritually (understanding God's nature), practically (living out our faith) – creation cannot hold together; we ignore God's plan and design for creation at our peril.

Being made in God's image and likeness "entails both the freedom and the responsibility to act on God's behalf."<sup>3</sup> Jesus said, "Follow me" – watch me, learn from me – then "go into all the world" and do as I do. By learning about understanding the nature of God, human ideas of 'dominion' and 'subjugation' are held in check.

### **3. Relationship**

In creation, God made provision for humanity:

Genesis 1:29-30, Psalm 145:15 (God provides food); Psalm 104:13, Isaiah 43:20 (God provides water).

To ensure God's continued provision:

- a. live according to God's plan and purpose for creation: Exodus 23:25 (worship God and God will provide). Not threat or bribery – live according to God's plan, and God's mechanisms of provision will function as intended); and
- b. care for God's creation: Genesis 1:2-3 (God creates rest); Leviticus 25:3-6 (allowing the land to rest, and God's provision in the resting). Work and rest – basis of creation; important for sustenance and sustainability of creation. 'Year of Jubilee' no longer recognised – overworked land, deforestation, polluted rivers, over-fished oceans...

Our relationship with creation impacts our relationship with other people – we mess with one, it affects the other.

Pope Francis: "a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.*"<sup>4</sup>

God's imperative to care for the poor and needy – correlates with God's nature and intention for creation: Proverbs 14:31 (insulting or honouring God); Proverbs 31:8-9 (speak up for the voiceless); Amos 5:24 (justice like a river)

Bible passages relevant to today:

Isaiah 41:17 (shortage of water); Lamentations 5:1-4 (privatisation of water); and especially Ezekiel 34:18-19:

"Are you not satisfied with grazing on the best pastures, that you must also trample down the rest with your feet? Or with drinking clear water, that you must also muddy the rest with your feet? My flock has to graze on what you have trampled underfoot and drink what you have muddied."

SDG 6 – information from EndPoverty2030's study guide *God's Global Goals*:

Access to drinking water: 82% (of the world's population) in 2000; 91% in 2015 (up 9%); still 663 million people drinking from completely untreated sources and seriously contaminated water.

Improved sanitary systems: 59% in 2000; 68% in 2015 (up 9%); 2.4 bn – no improvement; 1 bn – no facilities at all.

"As with many of these goals, lots of good things are happening but so much more is still to be done."<sup>5</sup>

The SDGs aim "to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment"<sup>6</sup> and "As Christians, we stand in solidarity with our global neighbours who are in need, and we all have a part to play in responding."<sup>7</sup>

"We do not only believe in a God of creation, but in a God of re-creation, and this means that as followers of Christ we are called to act for transformation."<sup>8</sup>

John 10:10 (fullness of life) – intended in creation: balance of nature, land and water provides sustenance; pattern of work and rest provides sustainability; all creation enabled not only to survive, but also to grow and to flourish.

### **Water Creed:**

We believe in God, who has created and is creating and who breathes life and purpose into all of creation.

We believe in Jesus, Son of God, Living Water, Bread of Life, Our Way and Truth, Light and Love.

We believe in the Spirit who danced over the waters at the dawn of creation

and who calls us to join in that dance of joy with the whole of creation today!

We believe water is a precious gift for the benefit of all, not a commodity for the benefit of the few.

We believe water teaches us to thirst for justice, peace, reconciliation, love and hope.<sup>9</sup>

Creator God, you are the source of living water. So fill us that we overflow with love for the world you created, and show us how we can bring the water of life to those in need. Amen.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict, in his *Address to the Clergy of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone* (6 August 2008)

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* (2015), #31

<sup>3</sup> Tucker, Gene M., 'Rain on a Land where No-one Lives: The Hebrew Bible on the Environment', p6. In *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 116, No. 1 (Spring, 1997)

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* (2015), #49

<sup>5</sup> EndPoverty2030, *God's Global Goals* (2018), p16.

<sup>6</sup> All We Can, in 'Conclusion', *God's Global Goals* (2018), p44.

<sup>7</sup> All We Can, in 'Conclusion', *God's Global Goals* (2018), p44.

<sup>8</sup> Allison-Glenny, Beth, 'Not just damage control: why we can have real hope as we act for our climate'. JPIT blog, 22nd October 2018

<sup>9</sup> From *Reflections on Water*, a resource compiled by the Integrity of Creation Working Group JPIC Commission of the USG-UISG

<sup>10</sup> Jude Simms, 2019