

Reflection delivered at Gisborne, 27 November 2022

*Prepare our hearts O God, to hear your word and obey your will and transform us into your children. Amen*

Romans 8:18-25

### ***The groaning creation and climate change***

Under the title – *what's going on with the prices of green vegetables*, Grower and chief executive of Leaderbrand Richard Burke said the price and availability of cabbage, broccoli and leafy vegetables had been affected by an extremely wet July. A National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) report said there had been heavy rainfall countrywide in July, with many areas of New Zealand recording the wettest July on record. Burke said wet paddocks meant growers could often not plant. Delayed planting affected future harvests and availability and created price spikes. Prolonged wet weather also affected the ability of plants to grow and, in turn meant a shorter shelf life.<sup>1</sup> Unusual weather, flood, drought, and extreme heat are part of the symptoms of climate change. We may hear the word 'climate change' quite often, but we may not think about it in relation to the consumer price of green vegetables, especially cabbage. We may hear about floods and natural disasters daily through news media, but we may not think about them in depth unless it happens in our backyard. But scripture says that the creation is groaning and longing for the revealing of the children of God.<sup>2</sup> What does it mean?

In Romans 8:18-23, Paul reveals the consequences of the relationship development between God, humankind and all creation in the present and future. Here non-human creation was 'frustrated' as a result of the sin of humankind. The consequences play as obstacles that prevent from achieving God's original plan for it. As such, both human and non-human creations became the subject of decay. But since the 'sin' of Adam contrasts with the 'grace' of Christ, the creation can also share a common fate of redemption.

Until now, we have largely viewed the 'groaning' as the creation's negative and passive response to its futility. But Paul says, "the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/farming/129550136/whats-going-on-with-the-price-of-green-vegetables>

<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:19

until now.”<sup>3</sup> It implies active participation of the non-human creation in the new birth of the children of God as if a mother actively uses the pain of labour to help deliver her baby, guiding her to strain and push at the appropriate time.<sup>4</sup> Once the ‘groaning’ of labour commences, it is unstoppable. The groaning of labour is part of God’s work towards the completion of the creation; thereby, it is positive and hopeful. While we acknowledge that it is God who ultimately redeems believers and the rest of creation, Romans 8 and Genesis 1 show that humans must be active representatives of God in the current context, working with God under his authority to develop, restore and improve the created world. The groaning creation wants to reveal children of God who will steward the creation on behalf of God.

What will be our confessional act on this issue? Reading books or articles about climate change or environmental issues may be one thing. As the church, we may also consider joining Eco church. Special Assembly 22 supported the proposal that the PCANZ becomes a denominational partner of Eco Church NZ and that individual presbyteries and parishes be encouraged to join Eco Church. Eco Church New Zealand is churches across Aotearoa, New Zealand, actively caring for God's earth as an integral part of its mission. A Rocha Aotearoa New Zealand established the Eco Church NZ project in 2020 as an ecumenical initiative to support church communities to actively care for God's earth as an integral part of their mission. Visiting the Eco Church website and reading their work may be a small step we can take today. In this way, we are being revealed as children of God to the whole creation. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:22

<sup>4</sup> Callister et al., 2004