Sermon thoughts on Lent 4: Genesis Chapter 1: 14-19

Light is good, darkness is good. God declares both the night and the day to be good. Darkness is important; it is a time for rest, for cooling in a hot climate, for sleep. Psalm 104: You make the darkness, and it is night when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.

The wording makes it clear that the stars and the planets do not have power in themselves, as astrologers would have us sometimes believe.

The Psalms are full of praise for the beauty of Gods creation, as I read at the start from Psalm 19.

The Sun moon and stars are also intimately involved in the rhythm of the solar system and the universe. God promises Noah in Chapter 8 of Genesis that whilst the earth remains, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall never cease. The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes writes to everything there is a season and a time for every activity under heaven”.

Celtic Christianity is well known for being strongly rooted in the natural seasons and cycles. Celtic prayers and blessings including different elements of the natural world and its rhythms.

The Sun moon and stars are also referenced in the scriptures about the future and end times; Matthew 28: then the sign of the son of man will appear in the heavens and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.

Acts 2: the prophet Joel predicted portents in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon as blood before the coming of the Lords great and glorious day.

And God said…This is the history of the fourth day's work; the creation of the sun, moon, and stars to serve as lights.

God created these bodies in the sky and assigned them several functions to benefit us:

* to make the distinction between day and night,
* to serve as indicators that would enable them to distinguish between the two divisions of the 24-hour day.
* to be the means of measuring time in hours, days, months, and years and creating the calendar
* to create and regulate the oceans tides.
* and to serve as signs for us to use in navigation of the world in general.

This should be enough to fill us with praise and thanksgiving.

Day four begins the second half of the creative week, but you might be forgiven for thinking it bears a striking likeness to the work of the first day Having eliminated the original chaos and perfected the four fundamental elements of light, air, water, and land. The Creator God begins a second series of operations, in which He places lights permanently in the sun, and fills the water with fish and the air with birds and the land with animals, and then in His final creative act, makes a man and a woman.

Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night.

Since the atmosphere has been completely purified, the sun, moon, and stars were for the first time unveiled in all their glory in the cloudless sky; and they are described as “in the firmament” which they appear to be to the eye, although we know they are really a great distance from it. They are in the upper part of it, which we have designated the starry heavens.

God had created the light on day one, but now He establishes a new order in nature by making the sun the dispenser of cyclic daylight, and the moon and stars shinning by night, so there would be alternating periods of day and night.

“Let there be lights,” are lights that are more magnificent than that created on the first day, having by now been condensed and reduced into these lights, which are higher in the heavens, and more powerful and influential, than that which was there after day 1.

It is important also to remember that whilst herbs and trees were created before the sun, the sun is now necessary for their life and for the production of fruit and leaves, I remember doing photosynthesis in biology at school.

“To divide the day from the night” refers to the artificial day, which begins at the rising of the sun and ends at its setting. This is different from the natural day, which lasts twenty-four hours and includes the night. This suggests i that the interchange of days and nights will be repeated continually: because God determined that the days should be distinct from the nights, so it directs the action of the sun and the earth until time ceases to exist. ” …and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years”.

That is, for "signs" of good and bad weather; for the times of ploughing, sowing, reaping; for the "seasons" of summer and winter, spring and autumn; for hours and days by the rotation of the earth on its axis for the space of twenty-four hours; and for "years" by which the earth moves around the sun for the space of three hundred sixty five days and some odd hours.

“And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so”. It is the function of the heavenly light-producing-bodies, to send us light, either their own or that reflected by them; to be light-bearers for the earth. No sooner had God spoken than it was done; because it was not an ordinary work that He did, but an act of creation. The lights of heaven are made to serve us, and they do it faithfully, but then we learn that we are called to set as lights in this world to serve God, even though at times we are not faithful to the purpose of our creation, our light does not shine before God as His lights shine before us, “You are the light of the world” (Matt 5:14; NKJV).

And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. This was His work which He did Himself; and it shows the foolishness of those who would want to worship these lights which were the creations of God and were placed by him in the heavens to serve their purposes on earth, beneficial to us yes, but not to be worshipped. These two "great lights" are the sun and the moon; and they may rightly be called great, especially the former, because the diameter of the sun is calculated to be about eight hundred thousand miles. The moon's diameter is 2175 miles, and its surface contains fourteen hundred thousand square miles. The moon has been called great, not on account of its size, since it is one of the smallest, second, I think to Mercury, but because of its role in reflecting the light of the Sun and is seen first on the horizon, looking like “a great light,” compared with the little twinkling stars; then its pale feeble light is literally eclipsed by the dazzling splendour of the sun. When this brilliant sphere rose in the morning and gradually followed its course through the heavens in a blaze of glory, it would appear “the greater light” that ruled the day. Both these lights may be said to be “made” on the fourth day—not created, because a different word is used here, which indicates they were composed, and assigned to the important and necessary mission of serving as lights to the world and regulating the divisions of time by their movement.

“The greater light to rule the day”, The sun was never meant to rule over mankind, although early tribes have worshipped it under the names of Molech and Baal; names which signify king and lord, as if it was their lord and king to whom they were to pay homage; but by the decision of God it would preside over our world, give it light, and continue to do so until God and Christ are the light in the New Jerusalem. And it rules alone; it is greater than the moon and all the other planets. It is called the "greater light,” in comparison to the moon, not only with respect to its size or substance, but on account of its light, which is far greater and stronger than that of the moon, which in fact receives its light from the sun, since the moon cannot make light, and is, in actual fact, a reflecting body.

The moon was designed by God to give light, although it is a fainter, dimmer light produced by reflecting it from the sun; and it rules alone, since the sun is on the other side of the earth at night. The moon is of great use to travellers and sailors (though not as useful as it used to be). It is called the “lesser light,” in comparison with the sun. Astronomers have determined that the moon is about fifty-two times smaller than the earth, and four thousand one hundred and fifty times smaller than the sun. It is greater than any of the stars, not really, but it appears greater to the eye. Although it borrows its light from the sun it is said to “rule the night” because of the service it does for the benefit of man.

“He made the stars also,” in vast numbers and scattered them across the heavens, and they gave light to earth in some lesser degree than the sun and moon. The moon is said to “rule the night”, but the stars share in that administration, since they add their light to what the moon provides— “So said the LORD, which gives the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night” (Jer 31:35;).

And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, He not only ordered precisely where they should be placed in the heavens, and made them stay there, but he placed them there with his own hands; He paid particular attention to the sun, and put it precisely at the distance where it would be the most beneficial: had it been set nearer to the earth, its heat would have been intolerable; and had it been further off it would have been useless; in the one case we would have been scorched by its heat, and in the other we would have been frozen.

“To give light upon the earth” is repeated from Genesis 1:15 to show the reason for which they were made, and how they were to be useful to the earth; being hung up like God’s chandeliers, to provide light for the inhabitants of earth, so that they may see to walk and work, and do all the activities of life, as well as providing warmth and comfort. It is amazing that light emitted from the sun, when it is at such a great distance from the earth, can reach it in so short a span of time.

and God saw that it was good.

God investigated the future and knew it would be “good;” that such lights in the heavens would be extremely beneficial to the inhabitants of the earth, which they would discover from their experiencing its benefits, and therefore they would have a great many reasons to be thankful, and to adore the wisdom and goodness of God’s creations. This clause was omitted from the first day’s work because the light was a glimmer and imperfect, but on the fourth day it was made clearer and complete.

And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.