Our Shared Responsibility for Creation

Thought for the Day
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A couple of weeks ago, Jewish communities throughout the world began the annual cycle of readings from the Torah, beginning with the shared history of humanity before moving on to what we might think of as the family history of the Jewish people.

We tend to emphasise the positives of these early chapters of Genesis – the teaching that we all have the same ancestry ought to a powerful antidote to any form of racial or ethnic discrimination or one-upmanship. But in fact the creation story ends with misfortune when Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden for picking the fruit of what we would now call a protected species.

Then ten generations later the Bible gives us a glimpse of climate calamity as torrential rain and rising sea levels combine to make the entire world uninhabitable. Noah is ridiculed for predicting this disaster and building an ark to survive it, but of course in the end Noah is proved right and only he and his family live.

That ought to be warning enough, but a generation later, the Bible tells of another catastrophe. The high-heid-yins of the day take it into their heids to demonstrate their supremacy by building an enormous tower to reach to the heavens, but find that their enterprise is frustrated by a complete breakdown in communication. Progress requires collaboration, it requires not just a common goal, but negotiation and agreement on how to get there, and even a common language – precisely what the Bible says was lacking at the Tower of Babel.

You don't need to take any of this literally in order to acknowledge the obvious messages – not only that we have more in common than divides us, and our shared responsibility for the rest of creation, but also our unique capacity to use language for good or for ill, to cooperate or to divide, to work together or to let enmity, malice, and ill-will get in the way of progress. That's not a hard choice, is it?