REFLECTIONS ON FARMED ANIMALS

A CreatureKind Fellowship Project 2021
We acknowledge all First Peoples and celebrate their enduring connections to Country, all creatures, stories and knowledge of this land now called Australia. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging on this stolen land. We acknowledge the work of Bruce Pascoe, Common Grace CEO Brooke Prentis, and Dr Anne Pattel-Gray, who have influenced our understanding on first nations perspectives for this project. We look forward to a time when indigenous knowledge and wisdom influences our food systems to create a sustainable future again, one that existed before colonial settlers, one that brings us together as one people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags of the first nations people on this land
In 2020 a group of fellowship candidates from around the world connected to produce resources for the Christian church to reflect and respond to the issue of farmed animal welfare. This project was created in Australia, and is a series of reflections looking at the local context and the intersection of contemporary social justice issues, including racism, speciesism, colonialism and first nations perspectives. It is intended as a simple and accessible resource to be used in part, or as a whole, together as a group or as an individual reflection.
I look at my 6-year-old granddaughter, and I wonder what kind of life she will have in the future: will there still be fish in the sea, koalas in gum trees and a liveable climate to allow her outdoors?

I’m watching her through the window in the garden, talking away to the chicken she carries like a handbag under her arm. Confident that the chicken is understanding everything she says, she continues with her talk around the yard, stopping in her tracks, and in an octave higher, says hello to a ladybird on a leaf.

Who knows, maybe they really can understand her, who are we to say. It’s this sheer wonder at all living creatures that we all held as kids that makes me believe a better world is possible, after all we too were once full of love for all creatures. Reaching out an arm from the pram to pat the passing dog, trying to give the cat a relaxing bath and chatting to chickens just seems to come naturally to kids.

It’s perfect, pure and good, I wonder if this is what Jesus meant when he said such is the Kingdom of heaven, in Matthew's Gospel, (19:14).

Throughout scripture, animals are present, they are seen, alongside the people, included in creation stories, the laws of the land, exile and liberation, sabbath rest and included in the restoration stories. I imagine them running around free in courtyards, on hillsides and in the marketplaces where Jesus walked. Indigenous communities around the world also value and include animals as part of their story and sustainability of their communities. Animals were seen, they were with us, their history is inextricably intertwined with us.

But we no longer see the lives of farmed animals today, apart from glimpses in passing paddocks, they are hidden from us. Farms today have much to hide, their financial success depends on it. For a glimpse behind the doors of factory farms on the backroads of this land would break the heart of anyone who cares for other living creatures.
A series of reflections on farmed animals in Australia

This series of reflections are designed to encourage conversation and exploration of how we as people of faith respond to the interconnectedness of social injustice, farmed animals and climate change, and how these threads of oppression are woven together. We are interdependent with all life on earth, including those hidden and unheard on factory farms across this land.

There is always hope

We are people of a big story, one with a vision of harmony and peace, the shalom of God, and we can choose to follow this path, a shared path in a world of endless possibilities, one that you have a vital role in changing for the sake of our communities for the future. Human and non human communities.

By addressing the oppression of the largest group of creatures on the planet, farmed animals, we will discover other intertwined oppressions on the way, some that may surprise you. By the end it is hoped you will find some common ground together on actions to improve our relationship and care for the 70 billion farmed animals on the earth today.
Farmed chickens, a story:

The crew met late one night and huddled in the back on a van headed out to the outskirts of Melbourne down a dirt road to the chicken farm. They pulled up just past the farmhouse at the front of the property, and behind the backdrop of pine trees were rows and rows of aluminium sheds. They stepped out of the van and put on full overall protective gear, gumboots and ventilation masks in complete silence. Just as they had planned, they walked in single file through the farm gate across the paddock to the first barn. The door was open, and they waded through the disinfectant trough as they entered. It was 4am and the automatic lights had just come on, the broiler chickens were chirping, they were chicks 8 weeks old and already halfway through their life.

Bred to be perpetually hungry some were already at the food troughs. Even through the masks the smell was overwhelming. The new girl doubled over gagging and coughing. They split up into twos and walked the length of the barn stopping to pull the younger chickens up out of the thick layer of excrement on the floor where they were stuck, and to place the already dead chickens together in a line for a photograph. United side by side like fallen tiny white soldiers, in a battle with forces way out of their control. They recorded as much photographic evidence as they could, and picked up the maimed and injured birds, as many as they could carry as they left.

“Isn’t that stealing” I said. “They are the ones that probably won’t make it, so we give them a shot at life, some do live after treatment” she told me. They would be taken to the vet as soon as they reached home and volunteers would take care of them after that finding homes for them around other chickens in backyards and sunshine.

I asked her, what had been the most striking or shocking thing she had seen that day. She had done many rescues and very little shocked her, particularly with chickens, the most abused and neglected of all farmed animals on the planet.

She pulled out her phone and showed me a photograph of a short yellow plastic chain hanging from a suspended food trough. What is that for I asked. She had a battle weariness about her far beyond her 21 years on this planet, and her voice sad and measured told me. “This farm was ethically accredited and so this was put there as a wellbeing concession, the chickens are supposed to play with it.”
Lord open our eyes to oppression, give us a heart of compassion and pour courage into our hearts to bring change on earth as it is in heaven.

Over 70 billion chickens are slaughtered every year on this planet, the highest number for farmed animals other than fish. Of the 70+ billion animals currently farmed annually around the world, 50 billion of them are factory farmed.

*Psalm 50:10-11*

For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine.

Factory farming ensures animals live a life of mutilation, stress, cruelty, and never experience what it means to live naturally from the moment they are born to their untimely death at the abattoir. It simply is not caring for creation in any way, and is progressively getting worse as the demand for cheap produce continues in our world.

“One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty” – Martin Luther King Jr.

Animal activists all over the world put their lives on hold, dedicate their energy and finances, voices and sometimes their lives to raise awareness of the cruelty and oppression of animals farmed, cut open, tested upon, and used for entertainment purposes. People of faith were among the very first activists, founders of the RSPCA, preaching kindness from the pulpit, such as John Wesley, and the Quaker tradition, and calling for a return to compassion.
Chickens naturally live 7 to 10 years. In nature, wild hens only lay 10 to 15 eggs a year, but in order to maximise profits they have been interbred to ensure up to 200 eggs a year. In the process more chickens are bred, so more male chicks are killed after hatching, while the females are sent off to egg farms. Free range is a loose term and doesn’t really mean a great life for hens, many live in cramped conditions, check your brand of eggs on the link in the resources.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you. I longed to gather you as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Matthew 23:37).

In Aboriginal culture and spirituality animals are understood differently. Graham Paulson, Aboriginal elder and Baptist minister.

“everything is interconnected, people, plants and animals, landforms and celestial bodies are part of a larger reality. In this world, nothing is inanimate, everything is alive; animals, plants, and natural forces, all are energised by a spirit. As such, humans are on an equal footing with nature; are part of nature and are morally obligated to treat animals, plants and landforms with respect.”

Animal totems are part of Aboriginal life as definers of peoples’ roles and responsibilities, and their relationship to each other and creation. There is so much we can learn from the oldest living culture on the planet that will give us a sustainable way forward to care for our land and all the creatures on it, as commanded in Genesis.
Speciesism, the belief that one species is above or better than another, has dominated human behaviour towards animals and creation since the beginning. Speciesism is at the heart of colonial thinking, where animals are seen not as living beings but a resource to be exploited, controlled, bred and sold without regard for their sentience, their capacity to feel pain and emotions. Animals are powerless to rise up against the tyranny of factory farming, driven by financial greed. We need to step in and step up. When we ignore oppression we are complicit in it.

In the middle east 2000 years ago a Jewish man compared himself to a chicken, and not any man either, but the Son of the Creator God. I wonder how that went down with the crowd.

American abolitionist Frederick Douglas said

“The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.”

Reflections:

- Imagine a world where farmed animals are valued, and cared for, that we can name them, as the first human did. Naming animals brings them closer to us, it connects us.
- What are your thoughts on the story? How much of our food growing, and rearing is hidden, do you know where your food comes from?
Prayer

Great Creator Spirit of the Universe
Lord of the freshly laid egg
Resting in a nest in a barn with a hen
We know love when we see it
We see her spreading her wings over them
We see her finding food for them
And they grow
We know love when we feel it
We feel it spreading like wings over earth
We feel it feeding our soul
And we grow
We know love when we hear it
We hear it like justice prophets calling us home
We hear stories that uplift us
And we grow
We know love when we taste it
We taste it in every seed bearing plant given
We taste food that is kind
And we grow
We know love when we believe it
We believe in a love so universal and deep
We believe love that transforms us
And we grow
We know a divine love that redeems
We know this love because of Your Creation
We know we are part of this

May all the sacred creatures of our Creator God,
our brothers and sisters,
walk, crawl, fly, swim and hop
In love, freedom and divine peace. Amen
Designing a Pig

A friend of mine once said, “imagine God designing the animals, shaping and colouring them, putting them down and the angels all cheering with delight and shouting, “Do it again! Do it again!”” And I can picture this, the masses of angelic beings all crowded around, hovering spectacles of glory and light and brightness, a fanfare of the highest order, more dazzling than the brightest night sky. The cheering and the hollering quieten down to a hushed silence, bated breath, waiting…waiting… and then….into this magnificent chorus of unimaginable beings stumbles the humble pig. All pink and playful and I wonder at the angels as they all bow the knee, to the honour the beauty of this little creature the Creator has just designed. And designed so well…

Lord open our eyes to oppression, give us a heart of compassion and pour courage into our hearts to bring change on earth as it is in heaven.

On this land pigs were brought over on the first fleet, the first of many live exports, some escaped their pens, and some were deliberately let loose. They formed wild pig communities all over the country. But it was not their country, and soon they became a problem for the local Aboriginal communities as they killed the natural wildlife, destroyed their crops and waterways. There are now 24 million feral pigs all over the country and are regarded by the department of agriculture as the biggest introduced mammal pest. As amazing as they are, they simply were never designed for this land now called Australia.
Over time pigs have evolved or been bred into friendly, highly sociable, intelligent and loyal creatures who live for up to 20 years. They are a bit like our beloved dogs, our best friends. I wonder how different we would treat the pig if we gave her this esteemed title too. And some of us have, there are over 1 million mini pigs kept as pets in America.

People have kept pigs on their properties for thousands of years, for lots of reasons—companionship, hunting, eating and in parts of Asia as organic toilets because pigs eat poo, so were part of the early design for the first toilets. Pigs will eat just about anything, so they became a great way to get rid of household scraps, fallen branches and overgrown blackberries.

See what I mean…designed SO well.

**Environmental racism** - The term first coined by African American civil rights leader Benjamin Chavis in 1982. It is “racial discrimination in environmental policy-making, the enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of colour for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in our communities, and the history of excluding people of colour from leadership of the ecology movements”

Slaughterhouses in my neighbourhood are situated in northern and western suburbs with lower income suburbs and higher migrant populations settled in those areas. Aboriginal communities in central Australia are very familiar with environmental racism, from nuclear testing sites in the 1950's and 60's to mining and huge feed lot farming operations today.
Pigs are given a raw deal in scripture, declared unclean in Leviticus 11, which seems a bit harsh and forbidden to be eaten, which is good news for pigs. Jesus used pigs to clean up some stray demons in Matthew 8:28. Pigs are good at cleaning up a mess, and I prefer to think that the pigs were just working in collaboration with Him on this gig. But just like all animals their original purpose was not food but companionship and naming an animal as we know from our pets brings us closer to them.

Genesis 2,18-20

God said, “It’s not good for the human to be alone; I’ll make him a helper, a companion.” So, God formed from the dirt of the ground all the animals of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the human to see what the human would name them. Whatever the human called each living creature, that was its name. The human named the cattle, named the birds of the air, named the wild animals; but did not find a suitable companion.

In nature baby pigs take 3 months, 3 weeks and 3 days to grow inside their mums before birth and have up to 10 siblings, perfect when you need someone to play with, which they love to do. The sow makes a deep nest before birth, away from the herd and talks constantly to the piglets as they are being born. After a week the piglets and their mum go back to the herd, the mums soon synchronise their feeding times.

In Australia most pigs are raised indoors their whole life on one of the 2700 pig farms. Artificially impregnated, put into a sow crate to give birth, where movement is highly restricted, and the piglets taken away 3-4 weeks later to be fed in pens for six months before sent to slaughter.
Local action

Pam Ahern started a sanctuary based on her companion, her beloved pig, Edgar Alan Pig. Edgars Mission loves and cares for over 450 rescued farmed animals in Lancefield just outside of Melbourne. It provides care, advocacy, support and education on the issue of farmed animals hoping to encourage compassion for all of them since 2003.

Reflection:
Think about the food you eat, is it still the same as your parents, and grandparents? Is it based on a bygone era? Is it a sustainable choice for the future of the planet?

Think about the food you serve in your faith gatherings, where has the food come from, were people or animals exploited along the food chain? If yes are there alternatives you can serve?
Prayer:

Creator of all creatures, including the pig, 
Lord of all lands, and King of the forests 
May your Spirit guide us on the path of restoration 
Open our eyes to the interwoven oppressions, 
the hidden injustices and the hidden world 
Of factory farms and their location on this land. 
God of all living things, Lord of mercy, 
Make us Spirit brave, strong and unwavering 
With compassion and wisdom 
To care and respect our companions on earth 
Our fellow creatures like the pig 
And end exploitation of all farmed animals 
End all exploitation Lord, 
So they can live, raise their young 
Live the full and natural lives you intended 
To love as you love, as in heaven

May all the sacred creatures of our Creator God, 
our brothers and sisters, walk, crawl, swim, fly and hop, in love, freedom and divine peace. Amen
Plenty more fish in the sea

If only that were true...
There are approximately 33,000 different species of fish in the ocean at the moment. It has been estimated that between 1 to 2.7 trillion fish are caught from the wild and killed globally every year: This doesn’t include the billions of fish that are farmed.

Lord open our eyes to oppression, give us a heart of compassion and pour courage into our hearts to bring change on earth as it is in heaven.

The Yuin first nations people of the land around the township now called Eden, had a long-standing partnership with killer whales. The story goes that the Yuin set up two fires on the beach and an old man would walk between the two, pretending to limp. It was believed the whales would feel sorry for him and drive a large whale into the beach for the tribe to take for their food. The tribe thanked the killer whales by sharing the catch with them, the tongue was thrown back into the waters. But this is more than a story; it was a practice known for centuries by the Yuin and also witnessed by the early Europeans who not only recorded the event but participated in the event. This continued for many years after invasion. Sadly, it ended the day one greedy European man shot a killer whale during the event.

(Taken from Dark Emu, Aboriginal Australia and the birth of agriculture. by Bruce Pascoe, published in 2018)

Traditional saltwater communities have been dependent on fishing from the beginning of their settlement. Coastal first nations people understood the rhythms of their land and the creatures on it and in the waterways. Fishing was always sustainable, only taking what was needed, with an unwavering confident in the abundance of the land and sea.

‘Fishing is actually sacred to us; it’s really part of our culture. So if people want to go fishing and if they want to do it our way, then they’ll learn the sacredness. You never take more than you need, for a start.’ — Sue Haseldine, Kookatha/Mirning woman, 2017
Fish are abundant in scripture, the first creatures to be called into existence, and would have been abundant in the seas and waterways of the earth 2000 years ago. Since the industrial revolution and the growth of consumerism fish are being taken from their environments in record numbers. The old argument, “Jesus ate fish, so can we” is often bandied around. But comparing a subsistence fishing community in Galilee to the government subsidised mega trawlers employed by big agricultural companies, where most of our fish comes from, just doesn’t make sense. Jesus followed a Mosaic diet, and so only some fish were allowed, certainly not the shellfish, crabs and shrimp that we throw into a fish dish today. So what would Jesus eat would actually be quite limiting, particularly as there is no mention of Him eating other creatures either. (York, Tripp, and Andy Alexis-Baker. 2012. A faith embracing all creatures: addressing commonly asked questions about Christian care for animals.)

In early Christianity, fish was the symbol, not the cross to identify belonging. It initially enabled Christians to identify themselves to each other in secret, because they did not want to be overheard by the Romans when they were gathering.

Genesis 1:20-22  "And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

Local action
There are no local fish recue groups outside of the RSPCA, and until recently fish were not regarded as sentient (conscious, feeling) creatures. They are not protected by animal cruelty laws and fisheries can leave them to die slowly on board the trawlers. Factory farms are not the answer either. They live in putrid, disease ridden enclosures, fed food colouring to look good for the consumer, and often escape passing on their diseases to the wild fish population. There are simply no sustainable practices in today’s fishing industry. On a good note, Sea Shepherd Australia are out there on the ocean fighting for sea life all over the planet, fighting illegal fishing and raising awareness of the problem of unregulated and indiscriminate fishing practices of big fisheries.
The UN estimates that we will run out of fish in the sea by 2048. Without a thriving sea we are in serious trouble, our fate as a species is interwoven into all creatures on our planet. Tiny plankton are an important carbon sink for atmospheric greenhouse gases, and the growth of plankton depends on carbon. Krill rely on plankton for food, and whales rely on krill, the interconnectedness of life is so profoundly and beautifully reflected in sea creature life.

Ecclesiastes 18-19 “As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other.”

‘Tides will tell us [when to go out fishing]… the weather will tell us. Those balanda [white people], they’ve got fish radar but we don’t use that one. We know the places to get what we want, it’s there. What we don’t want, we just leave it.’
— Jonathan Yalandhu, Yolŋu man of the Gupapuyŋu clan, 2017

“Christianity so often feeds into the notion of human exceptionalism and this becomes a stumbling block to identifying violence against those who aren’t human”
Carol J Adams Christian author and activist.

Psalm 148:7-10: “Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightening and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds.”

St Neot was a Cornish saint and lived as a vegetarian but the story goes that God gave him three fish in a pool and he was allowed to take one a day for food, which was mysteriously replenished the next day. He became known as the patron saint of fish, but there are many other stories attributed to his connection to animals at the time.

Reflection: All creatures exist in diverse shapes, sizes and purpose to glorify God, reshaping their purpose goes against this. Are we reshaping our world through the way we farm Gods creatures?
Prayer:

God of the sea, creator of sea creatures
We have fished your oceans forever
Taking what we need to live
Feed our people and to give to others
To sail seas
Down rivers, across lakes
Weaving nets, building dams
Ingenuity soaks things we make
A time we loved your creation
Put you before our nations
Lord lead us back to you now
Open our eyes to what’s real
On our plates in our meals
Our food choices
Louder than saltwater voices
Harvest wildlife from the sea
Of grief, of dark red sorrow
Leaving nothing for tomorrow
For future generations
The sea creatures flee
What’s left to see in this
Crystal blue abyss.
Colonial greed and western needs
Are driving this
Enslaving others,
Our sisters and brothers
Let us be your dismantlers of oppression
Come sabbath please
For creatures of the seas
Ordained by your word
Promises of a new world
Where all can live lives full
just as you planned
To love as you love, as in heaven,
On the sea and on the land

May all the sacred creatures of our Creator God, our brothers and sisters, walk, crawl, swim, fly and hop, in love, freedom and divine peace. Amen
“What then does it mean to follow Jesus? I believe that we are invited to gaze upon the image of the crucified Christ to soften our hearts toward all the suffering, to help see us how we have been bitten by hatred and violence, and to know that God’s heart has always been softened toward us. In turning our gaze to this divine truth-in dropping our many modes of scapegoating and self-justification- we gain compassion towards ourselves and all others who suffer”

Richard Rohr
It is said that Australia was built on the backs of sheep, and certainly sheep farming has been very profitable for some.

Dispossessed Aboriginal peoples watched the fertility of their land disintegrate with the introduction of sheep, and lost more than land, they lost connection to ancestors, ceremony, belonging, and their farmed crops. The native yam was an important food source and farmed crop for first peoples before colonisation. Lush yam daisy pastures in Victoria were decimated, and the yam daisy disappeared across the land wherever sheep were grazed. From Dark Emu by Bruce Pascoe.

Lord open our eyes to oppression, give us a heart of compassion and pour courage into our hearts to bring change on earth as it is in heaven.

Sheep farming has been somewhat romanticised, paintings and stories around shearers and idyllic farming communities in pastoral settings as havens from city life. But its not a true picture. Oppression of farm labourers was rife in colonial pastoralist communities, and Aboriginal workers were exploited for their expertise in understanding the land, tracking, and for farming and irrigation. Last year our prime minister said there was no slavery in Australian history, which shows the level of racial amnesia still present. Although convict labour was more commonly used, enslavement as farm workers and genocide of first nations people is well documented.
A bit of background..
Sheep are the gentlest and easiest of creatures to domesticate and were farmed as early as 11,000 BCE. They were farmed for centuries in flocks with natural lifespans, and in numbers to suit the community they belonged to. With the rise of capitalism and consumer demand for cheap meat, the farming of sheep moved from the traditional shepherd with the herd model, to large scale factory farming, and along with it a level of neglect and disregard for the natural life cycle of the sheep.

Psalm 104 10-14

*He makes springs pour water into the ravines;
 it flows between the mountains.*

*They give water to all the beasts of the field;
 the wild donkeys quench their thirst.*

*The birds of the sky nest by the waters;
 they sing among the branches.*

*He waters the mountains from his upper chambers;
 the land is satisfied by the fruit of his work.*

*He makes grass grow for the cattle,
 and plants for people to cultivate.*

In Australia one in four lambs will freeze to death in winter because of our demand for spring lamb. Lambs are naturally born in spring, not early winter, but to get them fat enough for slaughter farmers breed them early, and with hormone supplements are able to get multiple births from each sheep, giving her even less of a chance of protecting her babies from the weather. A far cry from sheep farming of the past.
In scripture sheep are mentioned over 80 times, a logical analogy for the agricultural setting for both old and new testament narratives. Jesus uses the shepherd analogy for himself, and feels compassion for his flock, says he will die for them, and search after a lost sheep until found.

John 10:14 “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and they know me. Just as the Father knows me, I know the Father and I give up my life for my sheep.”

Sheep do not express pain in obvious ways as human do. Our ableism orientated culture favours animals that respond in similar ways to us, dogs and cats show emotion in a way we can understand, so we respond to that.

But many other creatures do not show emotions in ways we can understand, and sheep are one of these creatures. For this reason, farmers have developed a facial expression scale to tell if sheep are in pain or not. This is probably why they are an easy creature to farm, no cries of complaint as they are left out in all weathers, without shelter, and why it’s been easy for farm workers to cut their tails off, castrate and de horn them without anaesthetic.

As creatures of the same God, we all are expressions of the creator, and our expressions are not the same, but we are all loved, made for a reason, and are all part of the restoration of all things.

Reflect on communication, where in your circle are there human and non human creatures that communicate differently, and in what way are you treating them differently?

Isaiah 53:7
He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So He did not open His mouth.
Sheep like all farmed animals in Australia are not protected from mistreatment under the national animal cruelty laws. Farmers are given suggested guidelines but they are purely voluntary at the moment. Something the Australian Animal Justice Party is fighting to change.

Things we can do:
Plant yam daisies! Support one of the indigenous plant nurseries around the country and repopulate your part of the country with plants that are native to the area.
Buy food products that support the farming of indigenous plants, herbs and spices
Find out the story of first nations people in your area and how colonial farming practices brought change to the communities and the landscape around you.

We can bring change by withdrawing our financial support from the sheep industry, leaving lamb off our plates, and by choosing alternatives to wool such as cotton and other cruelty-free fibres, and support one of the many lamb save and farmed animal sanctuaries around the country.
Join the campaign to stop live animal exports, a particularly cruel practice, with one vet assigned as a token gesture to look after thousands of sheep.

Isaiah 40:11
“He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.”
Prayer:

Creator of all creatures, the Lord my shepherd,
May your Spirit fill us with your boundless love
So we can have the heart of a shepherd too
To love beyond the boundaries
  Of difference
To love beyond the boundaries
  Of species
To love beyond the boundaries
  Of ability
To love beyond the boundaries
  Of the farm gate
To think about what we put on our plate
  And what we wear
For gentle sheep led onto the ship
  Betrayed and bereaved
By those who were meant to care
For lambs birthed in winter's snow
For those farmed shelter-less
  For those farmed
  For those harmed
We are sorry Lord
  Spirit guide us to love beyond
    ourselves
To love beyond our tiny worldview
  To see the world as you do
The world of diversity and beauty
Of you in all creatures Good Shepherd.

May all the sacred creatures of our Creator God,
our brothers and sisters, walk, crawl, fly,
swim and hop, in love, freedom and divine peace. Amen
Thou shalt not steal

I am an immigrant to this land now called Australia, I live on the stolen lands of the Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin Nation. The house that I rent is near the site of one of the many massacres of unarmed first peoples by the early settlers. Pastoralists arrived on the first fleet with dairy cattle in 1788, to reproduce a lifestyle they were accustomed to on the lands they came from. Just like so many other countries around the world, they assumed ownership of the “newly discovered” land that had belonged to first nations clans for over 65 thousand years. The land was not meant for dairy herds, and the land and its people paid dearly for this imposition.

Lord open our eyes to oppression, give us a heart of compassion and pour courage into our hearts to bring change on earth as it is in heaven.

Neolithic farmers in Britain were among the first to begin milking cattle for human consumption. According to scientists, the ability to digest milk was slowly gained some time between 5000-4000 B.C.E. by the spread of a genetic mutation called lactase persistence that allowed post-weaned humans to digest milk. It wasn't a natural food for our bodies.

Milk on subsistence farms was shared with the calf, necessary to ensure herd growth. But that's not the case today. Calves are removed immediately after birth, causing great suffering for both the mother cow and the baby calf. One destined to perpetual pregnancy and milking, the other for the slaughter before he's had a chance to live.

“Dairy cows are exploited twice, when they are alive and when they are dead.” Carol J Adams. Christian feminist writer.
Isaiah 11:6-9 The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra’s den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

It was in the 1940’s in Australia that an advertising campaign started to convince the general population that milk was essential to a healthy diet. The industry grew. It took until the Harvard School of Public Health report into bone density and milk consumption to dispel this myth in 1997. But it’s a myth that has persisted, passed on through generations of habitually consuming the lactation secretions of another species for our own use. Stolen milk on stolen land.

“The reality of maternal grief has many faces. Eve, lost one son at the hands of another. Hagar, abandoned in the wilderness to watch her son die. Bathsheba and Mary of course. Refugee mothers whose children are kidnapped at the U.S. border—the continuation of a long national history of tearing children of color away from their parents. Our own shameful history of the stolen generation of Aboriginal children taken from their mothers. Mothers who have lost children to violence; to addiction; to disease; to poisoned water and air and land; lost children to cultural connection; to others’ pursuit of power or material wealth at the expense of all else. These mothers are everywhere.”

From: Christians for social action.org
Local Action: Clarabelle, is a mother cow who was spared from the slaughterhouse after being rescued by Edgars Mission just outside of Melbourne. The workers at the sanctuary were delighted to discover that she was pregnant, knowing that for the first time in her life, the mother cow would be able to raise her offspring. When Clarabelle’s behaviour changed suddenly the sanctuary workers found that Clarabelle had given birth and had hidden her calf in long grass away from human sight, having remembered the pain and grief of the others being taken away. Thankfully she and her calf Valentine now live happy lives in the peace and harmony of the sanctuary, a piece of heaven on earth.

“If the Creator and Father of every living thing is rich in mercy towards all; if he does not overlook or despise any of the works of his own hands, if he desires even the meanest of them to be happy according to their degree –how comes it to pass that such a complication of evils oppresses, yea, overwhelms them?” (Sermon 60, “The General Deliverance,”) John Wesley
Reflections:

Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. ... Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

- What is the pattern of this world with regards to food on our plates? Stop to consider, we can create a fair food future based on our faith that teaches compassion and care for all of God's creation. We can choose rather than carry on with a diet that no longer aligns with who we are.

- Discernment: check what is in your shopping trolley, where do items come from, what are the ingredients? Do you know the food chain you are linked to? Is it one that imprisons other human or non-human creatures?

- As a people of faith, as children of the Creator God, do we serve food to our communities that reflects our belief? Do we choose the best foods we can find for our community meals for those in need? Do we give them cultural and dietary appropriate foods?

Supporting factory farming, supports animal cruelty, and damages ecosystems and wilderness on our planet, how can we be part of the change to ensure we bring change to this, how can we renew our minds regarding the food we eat every day?
Prayer:

Heavenly Creator God of all creatures
Infuse us with your holy spirit
Open our minds, renew our thinking
about our eating and drinking
We are people of your kingdom come
Your will be done
A kingdom freedom
For all living beings
Free from corporations of wrongdoing
Free from factory farms
Dismantle machinery that harms
Aiding and abetting cruel greed
Enslaving mothers
Killing their young
In a system of oppression
They do not belong
Teacher of compassion
Preacher of kindness
Give us the words to speak up
To make a stand for kindness
To let others live
To let others thrive
We thank you Creator
For Edgars Mission
And for all sanctuaries
For all activists and advocates
Who speak up for your creatures

May all the sacred creatures of our Creator God,
our brothers and sisters,
walk, crawl, fly, swim, and hop
In love, freedom and divine peace. Amen
If we were sincerely looking for a place of safety, for real security and success, then we would begin to turn to our communities - and not the communities simply of our human neighbours but also of the water, earth, and air, the plants and animals, all the creatures with whom our local life is shared.

(“Racism and the Economy" by Wendell Berry)

The Duck

The Karen people of Myanmar are an ethnic minority group, who migrated to Australia to escape persecution from the Burmese government. Like many migrants they settled close to the larger cities to find work and education resources for their families. Through a recruitment agency many relocated to a small town in country Victoria to work in a meat processing plant. Its quite a different life for the Karen, who were mostly small subsistence farmers, rarely owning animals. The climate is a stark contrast from the Burmese jungle to the dry flat landscape if the land around Nhill.

Lord open our eyes to oppression, give us a heart of compassion and pour courage into our hearts to bring change on earth as it is in heaven.

Their resettlement here is largely accredited to the local food processing plant for ducks who could not find enough workers locally. Luv-a-Duck is a multi-million-dollar Australian business that has been in operation for over 40 years. The processing plant, situated at Nhill, employs 117 workers. Today, the Nhill plant processes 20,000 ducks a shift, more than 100,000 a week.
On one hand this is a great success story of a people group who were welcomed and settled into a new land, embraced by the townships mainly European Australian population. Success measured by the economic benefit to the town and the business. The company has been given awards along the way, and has also exposed for animal cruelty too. The few interviews with the Karen people show an acceptance of their new home, and relieved to be able to work and have stability for their families after the horror of persecution in their own land.

But for the ducks it’s a different story. They live without water in their short and traumatic lives before slaughter at 8 to 10 weeks of age. Ducks generally live anywhere between 5 and 10 years and need water to keep clean, and because they are not designed to stand on their webbed feet all day. In the factory setting some die of mishandling, parasites and starvation when they can no longer walk to the food trough. Like many migrants, its unlikely we will hear complaints from the Karen workers. Luv a Duck revenue last year dropped during Covid, to $22 million, quite an achievement with only 117 employees on minimum wage.

*The foreigners residing among you must be treated as native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.* —Leviticus 19:34
Environmental racism is a type of racism perpetrated by the disproportionate location of environmental hazards near economically and socially disadvantaged and minority population groups. It is common to all types of industry, just look around where you live. Checking the map around my home city I saw the placement of meat processing plants and chemical factories in the low-income, high migrant population outer western suburbs.

Jesus tells his disciples, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him…he will say to those at his left hand, 'I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink…Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me’” (Matt. 25: 31-46).

Ducks in Australia
There is one native duck in Australia the wood duck, which is illegal to shoot except in Victoria, where quotas were increased recently. Activists including the Animal Justice Party are actively campaigning against this cruel sport that leaves many ducks carrying pellets in their bodies and living with permanent injuries for the rest of their lives. Ducks used for factory farming are a breed imported from England and France that grow quickly and are unable to fly away.
The black duck is the totem of the Yuin nation. Here is the story of the black duck as told by a Yuin elder, Yungha-dhu.

“Back in the old days, when the people used to live around here, a lad named Merriman had his totem called Umbarra the Black Duck. Umbarra warned Merriman everywhere he went of the danger. How he did it was he fluttered. The Black Duck fluttered and he dived down into the water and made splashes. When Merriman, the old man, saw that bird doing that, he knew that there was danger coming. One day, all the tribe was out getting a feed of fish, bimbullas and djungas. Merriman spotted Umbarra and he was going off his head. He was diving in the water, splashing about, ruffling his feathers up and so Merriman knew there was some people coming. He told all the people to get all the women and children. He put them in the canoes and he sent them out to the island, Merriman’s Island. All the women and children, and the Elders, went out there. All the warriors were around the lakeside waiting for these other fellas. They were coming here to steal the women. The night came and those fellas came. They were sneaking up and, as they were getting nearer, the Black Duck he warned the people. When they came and tried to go to the island where all the people were, all the warriors on there kept them off from invading that land and taking the women.”

Beryl Carmichael, Yuin elder, “my traditional name is Yungha-dhu.”
Hosea 2:18
And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety.

Ducks are also farmed for their down feathers, plucked from them while still alive, causing great pain and distress, and repeated as the feathers regrow. As consumers it is important to discern the fillings in down/padded jackets and quilts to ensure we are not supporting this barbaric practice. A good practice accreditation has been developed for this market, but as with many accreditations, it still means the animals die for the product, and industry regulation is poor.

“To say that we love God and at the same time exercise cruelty toward the least creature is a contradiction in itself”
John Woolman, 18thc Quaker and anti-slavery pioneer.

Reflection: How can you and your faith community lead the way in a restorative food practice, what foods would you serve, or not serve to reflect who we are as the people of the Creator God.
Prayer:

Spirit hovering over the water
Foreseeing good things to come
All creatures designed
With beauty in mind
With purpose and place
Still waiting
Snow white pekin ducks
Shipped over in cages, colonial breeds
And colonial greed cages them still
Standing still
Still waiting
Webbed feet cramped and sore
On dry factory farm floor
No water for them
Still waiting
Wood ducks dawn flight since dreamtime
Leaving her babes in the nest
Red feathered pellets in chest
Hovering over the water
Before her spiralling fall
Still now
For our spiralling fall
Forgive us Lord
For our failure to hear the call
Forgive us Lord
For the new world coming
We pray Lord
In stillness, waiting.

May all the sacred creatures of our Creator God,
our brothers and sisters,
walk, crawl, fly, swim, and hop
In love, freedom and divine peace. Amen
Conclusion:

"I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you-the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you-every living creature on earth." (Genesis 9:9-10)

Climate Change: Today there are 7 billion people on the planet, and 70 billion farmed animals. Industrialised animal farming is simply unsustainable, using land and water resources beyond what our planet can cope with. We cannot continue this path and hope everything will be ok for the future generations, it's not possible. Rainforests and wild places are being destroyed for farming operations globally. This reduces our capacity to store carbon, which means temperatures will continue to rise disrupting weather patterns. It is essential we act now for the sake of our children's and grand children's future, as well as for all creatures of our God and King.

At the time of writing this, earth overshoot day is March 22, that means the resources are done, everything else we use to provide for our lifestyles is borrowed against the future. Factory farming is the major contributor to climate change. Its in your hands now.

As each era passes we recognise the sins of the past one, slavery, oppression of others through colonisation, racism, gender discrimination, and we look back in disbelief at the inaction of others. One day we will look back on this time and wonder in disbelief that we could as people, allowed such abject cruelty and oppression that dominates the farmed animal industry globally. Let’s not live with regret.

Lets look forward to a world where we see a return to Gods nonviolent creation, the vision of Isaiah in 11:1-9, and live as we were intended to, alongside all creatures in perfect Shalom, free of the systems of oppression that desperately need to be dismantled. We can do this together as a community.
St. Basil’s Prayer for the Increase of Human Compassion
A.D. 375

The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof. Oh, God, enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all living things, our brothers the animals to whom Thou gavest the earth as their home in common with us.

We remember with shame that in the past we have exercised the high dominion of man with ruthless cruelty so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to Thee in song, has been a groan of travail.

May we realize that they live not for us alone, but for themselves and for Thee, and that they love the sweetness of life.
Things you and your faith community can do:

- Run events that raise issues around care for Gods creatures, an animal blessing on St Francis Day for example, following the liturgical or casual style of your faith gathering to suit your community

- Support and visit local animal sanctuaries, volunteer when you can.

- Earth Hour observance, - picnics in the dark once a year. https://www.earthhour.org.au/

- Get into some of the resources available to you through the CreatureKind website, updated regularly with blogs and links. If you want to go further check out their fellowship program. https://www.becreaturekind.org/

- Watch the documentary filmed in Australia on animal farming: Dominion. It is an important and relevant insight into today's farming practices. Yes, it's not easy to watch in parts, and you need to sit with courage and resolve to hear from those who do not have a voice to speak up against oppression, but it's the only way you will know for yourself the truth of the matter. https://www.dominionmovement.com/watch


- Include one line prayers for animals each time you gather, just one line to include and acknowledge they have a place in our lives as fellow worshippers of the same God.

- Check out DefaultVeg.org website for ways of making the food you serve at gatherings and conferences vegetarian

- Support farmers markets, and local producers wherever possible before heading to the supermarket. https://farmersmarkets.org.au/

- Grow veggies in your backyard and arrange a monthly produce swap outside your local café or at the church, it's a great way to catch up with others in the neighbourhood who are keen to see a better food system, interested in healthy eating, or simply do this for fun. https://www.localharvest.org.au/


- Read, check out some of the suggested readings that follow, or link in with CreatureKind to get the latest blogs and information.

- Consider keeping animals off the menu at home, there are ever increasing alternatives available online recipes and plant based alternatives in all of the major supermarkets.
Books that influenced this project:

**On Indigenous perspectives:**
- Dark Emu Pascoe, Bruce.
- The Great White Flood: Racism in Australia: Critically Appraised from an Aboriginal Historical-Theological Viewpoint. Pattel Grey, Anne.
- Sand Talk. Yunkaporta, T.
- Shalom and the community of Creation: an Indigenous Vision. Woodley R.

**On Animal Theology:**
- Creaturely Theology, on God, humans and other animals. Clough and Deane Drummond.
- Creatures of the same God. Linzey, A
- A Faith Embracing all Creatures. York, Tripp & Alexis Baker, A
- Vegangelical, how caring for animals can shape your faith. Withrow King, S.

**On Feminism:**
- The Sexual Politics of Meat. Adams, Carol.J.
- Ecofeminism, Feminist intersections with other animals and the earth. Adams, Carol,J.

**On Racism:**
- White Fragility. Diangelo, R.
- https://www.drchristophercarter.com/ writings on racial justice and the role of farmed animals
- The Great White Flood: Racism in Australia: Critically Appraised from an Aboriginal Historical-Theological Viewpoint. Pattel Grey, Anne.

**On Ableism:**
- Beasts of Burden: Animal and disability liberation. Sunaura Taylor
THERE'S A NEW WORLD COMING