



Season of
Creation 2

Cover Icon: *St Francis*

by Bob Mash, Cape Town 2012

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FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"I am delighted to introduce 'Season of Creation Two', and warmly commend it for wide use across the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, to help us in responding to God's call to care for his creation.

Caring for the environment has been identified as one of the priority areas for action at Provincial level, as part of our Vision for our church. Yet our vocation to be faithful stewards of all that God has entrusted to us is not new, being rooted in the creation accounts with which our Bible opens. Here we read that God 'formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life ... and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it' (Genesis 2:7, 15).

Sadly, we have not done a great job of taking care of God's good gifts. Instead, all too often we bring about lasting damage. Now we are faced with environmental degradation, climate change, and, in many places, soaring food prices and falling food security. These resources remind us that with God's help, we can rediscover his vision for living in harmony with the world in which he has placed us.

May God bring blessing to your people and community as you use this resource.

Yours in the service of Christ"



(Archbishop Thabo Makgoba)

Acknowledgments

We appreciate the permission to use materials from the following sources:

- Anglican Alliance
- Churches together in Britain and Ireland
- World Council of Churches

Use of this book

This book is designed to be used together with Season of Creation, there are new themes but the liturgical notes and additional liturgical materials from the first Season of Creation can be used again. It is intended to be used during the Season of Creation (the month of September ending with St Francis day on the 4th of October) but can be used at any time during the year.

This book contains material on the following themes: climate change and eco-justice, food and environmental justice, water, sustainable energy and biodiversity. The section on biodiversity links with St Francis day and the blessing of animals.

There is a clear link between care for God's creation and justice, for our degradation of God's world is impacting upon the most vulnerable in society.

The Environmental Network of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa:
Rev Canon Rachel Mash, Ven. Andrew Warmback, Rev Tim Grey, Bishop Geoff Davies, Kate Davies, Shaun Cozett, Maropeng Moholola, Nonhlanhla Shezi.

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EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER FOR SEASON OF CREATION

The Lord be with you.

And also with you

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to God

Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God of all of Creation.

It is right to give him thanks and praise

You spoke the Word and all that is in heaven and on the earth, all things, came to be. Your Spirit hovered over the primal elements, and you brought forth life in forms innumerable, including this our fragile earth, and we amongst its inhabitants.

As our past is in you, so our hope for the future rests with you.

As we have turned from your way, so we turn again to the warmth of your love.

Through you all things are brought to new life.

And now we give you thanks for the glories of your creation given into our care, and for the opportunities we have to share that richness with all your people

And so with the wonders of creation and the songs of praise of all your creatures both in heaven and on earth we praise you now and forever saying:

Holy, holy...

In the night that Jesus was betrayed, he took bread, work of human hands, gift of our earth, and gave thanks to God. He broke the bread to speak to us of the breaking of his body upon the cross. He gave it to his friends and said:

Take and eat, for this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

He took the wine, work of human hands, gift of our earth, and gave thanks to God, Creator. He poured out the wine to speak to us of the pouring out of his blood. He gave it to his friends saying: This is my blood of the new covenant, shed for you and for all creation for the forgiveness of sins. Every time you drink of the wine, do this in remembrance of me.

So we proclaim the mystery of faith

Christ has died

Christ is risen

Christ will come again.

Therefore God, we who seek your reconciliation; we who need reconciliation one with another; we who hope for reconciliation with all creation, draw close to this mystery.

In being broken, spilt and buried, life sprang forth again. In the breaking, there is an opening up; in the spilling, there are the roots of sharing; in death and burial, there is the seed of the new life to come.

As we look in our world, in our lives, and in our hearts, for his second coming, keep us close to this vision that we have seen. Through the giving in the bread and wine, reconcile us to our world and give us the broken oneness, the spilt unity, and the buried resurrection by which we can restore your creation and fulfil your will.

Send upon us, and upon all your creation, the life giving Spirit who first moved upon the waters of the deep.

Stir in us the creative and redeem the destructive. Unite us with you through the body and blood of your Son, your Word made flesh as your Word has made flesh.

By whom, and with whom and in whom, in the unity of your Creative Spirit, with all that has been, is, and will be in your universe, we stand before you and worship you, God of all, in songs of everlasting praise,

Blessing and honour and glory and power be yours forever and ever.

Amen.

Lord's prayer etc

Final blessing

Go out into the world rejoicing, and encounter the Creator who waits to meet you there;

savour its richness and diversity and live as those who praise God for its bounty;

and the blessing of the Creator God, the Eternal Father, the Risen Son and the Promised Holy Spirit bless you that you might be a blessing to others today and always.

Amen

From Season of Creation. Written by Rev A Warmback. Authorised for use in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa

LECTIONARY FOR SEASON OF CREATION TWO

THEME	OLD TESTAMENT	PSALM	NEW TESTAMENT	GOSPEL
Climate change and eco-justice	Isaiah 24: 1-6 (It speaks of the earth lying polluted under its inhabitants)	Psalm 98:1-9 (The earth responds to the saving work of God and welcomes it)	Rom 8: 18-25 (Human salvation means relief for the created order)	Matthew 8: 23-27 (Jesus' authority over wind and waves)
Food and environmental justice	Lev 25: 8-24 (Restoration and a return to equity through the principle of Jubilee)	Psalm 85 (Link between righteousness and the wellbeing of the land)	James 5:1-8 (Economic imbalances caused by excessive wealth in a few reflect in the cries of the labourers)	Luke 4: 16-21 (The role of the messiah)
Water	Gen 21: 8-19 (Dependency on water)	Psalm 104:10-17 (Recognition of the relationship between water and life and God as the provider)	Revelation 22:1-7 (Water as metaphor for the life that flows from God)	John 4: 1-15 (The spiritual meaning of water)
Sustainable energy	Leviticus 25:8-24 (A sustainable strategy for agriculture)	Psalm 46 (God remains the source of our strength and sustainability no matter what else happens)	Col 1:15-23 (All things created through Christ)	John 3: 16-21 (God sent his Son for the salvation of the whole of creation)
Biodiversity	Gen1:12-28 (The story of the beginning of biodiversity)	Psalm 148 (Eco praise !)	Rev 5:11-14 (Biodiversity –all creatures come together in praise)	Matthew 10:36-33 (God values all of His creatures)

CLIMATE CHANGE & ECO-JUSTICE

The earth's climate has changed throughout history, sometimes drastically. However, the global climate change we are experiencing now has two primary sources, deforestation and the burning of fossil fuels, both resulting in dangerous levels of greenhouse gases. Over 75% of carbon emissions today come from fossil fuels.



The United Nations Foundation has summarized the consequences, unless we take immediate action: the most likely outcome will be rises in the global average surface temperature to dangerous levels (by 0.2 to 0.4 degrees C per decade) throughout the 21st century.

These scientists conclude that we must halt further temperature increases to a minimum of 2 degrees; otherwise climate change will be disastrous. Increases in sea level, extreme weather, and the acidity of oceans may not be reversible, which will result in disruptions in ecosystems beyond the point to which humankind can adapt. The vast majority of people – particularly the poor, women, the elderly and children – in water-scarce regions may not survive.

The academic journal "Science" reported in 2012 that the current rate of carbon emissions and its impact on ocean acidity is unparalleled in the last 300 million years of Earth history, "raising the possibility that we are entering an unknown territory of marine ecosystem change."

**By 2100,
our climate
will have
risen by 3 to 5
degrees since
1750.**



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Currently, about 15% of the world's energy production is based on renewable energy, and this figure can significantly improve with committed, effective political leadership. For example, it has been estimated that measures taken in Brazil to conserve energy since the 1970's have reduced consumption of non-renewables by nearly 50%.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says that documented temperature increases have already been observed in the following ways:

- 1 in the Arctic and Antarctic regions with the melting of polar ice;
- 2 in sea-level rise contributing to the loss of coastal wetlands;
- 3 on agriculture and forestry in the Northern Hemisphere (earlier spring plantings and forest disturbances due to fire and pests);
- 4 on agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa, where women are the primary farmers, and where warmer, drier conditions have reduced the growing season;
- 5 on human health, such as infectious diseases and the effects of allergenic pollen.

The World Health Organization concludes that climate change already contributes to the emergence and intensification of infectious diseases, including Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome, West Nile virus, malaria, and dengue fever – diseases which are likely to spread more quickly in developing and the least developed countries. Malaria is spreading in populated areas of Zimbabwe and the African Highlands, which were recently not at risk (United Nations Foundation and Sigma Xi, 2007).



Today, 21% of the world's population lives within 30 km of coastlines. Sea level rise, which could reach one meter or more by the end of this century, will profoundly affect low-lying areas in the most vulnerable countries like Bangladesh, resulting in the complete loss of fertile land, massive migrations of human populations, and starvation.

More intense storms and flooding along coasts and mountain valleys will create a staggering number of environmental refugees in search of food and shelter at re-location centers that most governments will be unable to provide.

Increased levels of carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels are very likely contributing to the rapid rise of asthma.

Four sovereign states – Tuvalu, The Republic of the Marshall Islands, The Republic of Maldives, and Kiribati – are home to nearly a half million people whose habitable land will be completely inundated by the end of this century.

The impact of increasingly severe coastal storms together with sea level rise would displace roughly 130 to 450 million people during this century.

Indigenous peoples are especially vulnerable to the consequences of climate change, especially in coastal areas where sea-level rise has begun. Changes in ecosystems will have a harmful impact on every dimension of indigenous life.

WHAT THE CHURCHES CAN DO

- A good first step in reducing your carbon footprint in buildings and homes is to conduct an energy audit, while beginning to use renewable energy whenever possible.
- Simply turn off electric lights when they're not being used or when they're not really needed.
- Convene congregational discussions to strengthen community ties and promote inter-faith co-operation in relation to the adoption of renewable energy.
- Bring before your political leadership the imperative to use all means, including legislation and the removal of oil/gas subsidies, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Use public transportation whenever possible, and organize car pools in your workplace.



BIBLE STUDY – CLIMATE CHANGE AND ECO-JUSTICE

INTRODUCTION

The Bible describes the beauty and abundance of creation. It also talks of human injustice and oppression, distorting relationships amongst people and with the land. The Book of Isaiah offers inspiring images of these relationships being restored, so that all life is in harmony and justice with each other and creation. As Isaiah 58:6 says, this will require a kind of 'fasting' or self-denial, to reject greed and embrace justice. These words speak to us today, where the greed and overconsumption by some is having dire impact on the earth's climate and leading to desperate suffering in many parts of the world. We have little time to act – but must speak and act now.

This Bible study is for use by small groups or individuals, to be adapted to your own context.

ISAIAH 32:15-17 – THE PEACE OF GOD'S REIGN

...until a spirit from on high is poured out on us,
and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field,
and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.

Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.

The effect of righteousness will be peace,
and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust for ever.

My people will abide in a peaceful habitation,
in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places.

Isaiah 58:6 – God's justice



Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords
of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

DISCUSSION

You may open in prayer. Read the Bible passage twice and then discuss these questions:

In biblical times:

- What do you think these two passages are about? Discuss each and retell in your words.
- In Isaiah 32:15-17, what happens when people live with the Spirit in harmony with the land?
- What happens when justice and righteousness prevail? To what kind of justice do you think this refers?
- Isaiah 58:6 talks of a different kind of fasting or self-denial. What kind of human greed would lead to injustice and oppression of others?
- What do these passages say about God's vision for humanity and his creation?

In our own times:

- What do we recognise from this psalm in our world today?
- In what ways has humanity been unjust and damaged the environment?
- What is the impact of this damage on others, including the poorest communities?

- Isaiah 58:6 talks of fasting and ending greed that overcomes justice and oppression. What should people deny themselves to help bring justice for others and care for creation?
- What is our prayer? What practical actions can we commit to take at individual and community level?

FURTHER PASSAGES FOR READING

Genesis 1: 1 – 2:15

Psalms 8:3-9

Romans 8: 19-23

Revelation 22: 1-3

REFERENCES AND OTHER BIBLE STUDIES

[www.jubilee-centre.org/
uploaded/files/resource_267.pdf](http://www.jubilee-centre.org/uploaded/files/resource_267.pdf)

www.arochoa.org

World Council of Churches:

www.oikoumene.org/en/programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/eco-justice

www.ecocongregation.org

PRAYER

Loving Father,

We give thanks for the abundance of your creation. We pray for forgiveness where our greedy and unjust actions have harmed the environment and our neighbours. Please give us strength to change our behaviour and courage to challenge others. Give us a passion for justice to support those affected by climate change and protect us when we face these challenges ourselves. Help us to see clearly the way to restore right and just relationships with the environment and each other, for the good of all.

In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.



SERMON NOTES:

CLIMATE CHANGE & ECO-JUSTICE

Matthew 6.19-34

The current economic crisis is deeply linked to the social and environmental crises. The link is that our relationship with wealth and possession has become idolatrous – as a society we have been seeking happiness through things, rather than through relationships. The values Jesus proclaimed – God's Kingdom values – suggest that we should rather invest in relationships – with God, people and creation.

The Context – a Triple Crisis

The credit crunch is deeply connected to our unsustainable use of the earth's resources, and the pressures this is putting on financial systems and also on human society.

"It is becoming clearer how far we have been mortgaging our children's tomorrow to fund our today, both financially and in our use of the finite resources of the earth ... Free markets cannot flourish within a value-free environment." (Bishop of London)

Both financially and environmentally we cannot keep borrowing from what is not really ours. There is much talk currently about the three pillars of sustainability: economic, social and environmental. Today, all three are being profoundly shaken. Economically, the myth that unlimited growth could continue forever has been shattered. The global economy may be 5 times the size it was 50 years ago but it is now running up against the twin buffers of unrestrained greed and the planet's limited resources. Oil will peak soon if it hasn't already. Rising carbon emissions are causing unpredictable weather patterns that make agriculture, transport and insurance highly unpredictable. In a world of economic boom, two billion people live on less than R10 a day and 60% of the earth's ecosystems have become degraded.

Moreover, the myth that more money would automatically make us happier is being challenged in most affluent western societies. The psychologist Oliver James has described the social virus 'Affluenza' whereby we are sucked into an addictive cycle of believing that buying more stuff will make us more happy, whereas it simply leaves us wanting more. Economic woes, social unease and environmental depletion – the three pillars on which our societies are built, are being shaken to the core, and people are searching for a different way of being, and of living.

So, we have a context of creation in crisis – a crisis caused by humanity in crisis about its purpose and values. In this context what does our Christian faith have to offer? Recognising that too often we in the churches have simply mimicked the values of wider society, where should we be different?

In our reading from Matthew 6, Jesus offers a radically different approach to how we value the economic, the social and the environmental. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6.19-21 NIV).

Jesus is clear – money and possessions can easily take God's place in our lives.

Jesus' challenge to our current crisis is also clear. We have turned creation into commodities and people into units of production. We have been worshipping mammon – economic growth and prosperity, rather than worshipping God. In the Sermon on the Mount, of which this reading is a part, true values lie not in accumulating more material possessions, but in cultivating deeper relationships.

Rather than our happiness depending on balancing economic, social and environmental sustainability, Jesus offers us an alternative model. Our true happiness lies in our relationships – firstly with God and his Kingdom values, and then with people and with the non-human creation.

If we seek first God's Kingdom – his rule and his values – then our current crises fall into perspective. The worries of people in Jesus' time were so similar to our worries today - food, clothing, housing, saving for a rainy day – many of the universal human worries. Jesus does not say these things don't matter. Rather he says something a bit surprising: look at God's creation – at birds and at flowers. Become ornithologists and botanists!

In his wonderful paraphrase 'The Message', Dr Eugene Peterson puts these verses like this:

*"Look at the birds, free and unfettered,
not tied down to a job description,
careless in the care of God.*

*And you count far more to him than birds ...
Walk out into the fields and look at the wild-
flowers.*

*They never primp or shop, but have you ever
seen colour and design quite like it?*

*The ten best-dressed men and women in the
country look shabby alongside them.*

*If God gives such attention to the appearance
of wildflowers*

*- most of which are never even seen –
don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in
you, do his best for you?*

*What I'm trying to do here is to get you to
relax,*

*to not be so preoccupied with getting,
so you can respond to God's giving."*

As we take our minds off our preoccupation with tomorrow's worries and deepen our relationship with God's Kingdom values, so everything falls into perspective. Spending time in God's creation – going for a walk, watching plants, birds, the waves at the beach, the movement of the planets and stars, digging a garden – all of these can be ways in which God helps us to rediscover what is really important. We need to spend time on our relationships with people, with family and friends. We also need to develop relationships with the poor and grow in God's love and compassion. And as we develop our relationship with God, our materialistic values will be challenged and changed

Rev David Bookless: A Rocha

Source: Churches together in Britain and Ireland

Global Warning

Creator God – maker and shaper of
all that is,

seen and unseen;

You are in the expanse and depth
of Creation, and in the processes
that make life possible.

Yet we are distracted by the gods
we make ourselves and our
lives become fractured and fragmented.

In our brokenness we disturb the
Earth's capacity to hold us.

Instead we find climate uncertainty
and global injustice.

Call us back from the brink.

Help us to choose love not fear,
to change ourselves and not the planet;
to act justly for the sake of the vulnerable;
and

to make a difference today
for life tomorrow.

In your name – Father, Son and Spirit.
Amen.

Martyn Goss 2008: Source: Churches together in Britain and Ireland.

FOOD & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Intensive industrial agriculture can undermine human health and the integrity of ecological systems. The historical record suggests that people have traditionally used in the order of 10,000 species of plants for food, which maximizes nutrition. Today, only 20 major crops (primarily wheat, rice and corn) provide 90 percent of the world's dietary intake (The UN Commission on Sustainable Development, 2008).



In sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture is becoming a predominately female activity as a consequence of male out-migration. Women now constitute the majority of small farmers, providing most of the labour and managing a large part of the farming activities on a daily basis (The Food and Agriculture Organization, 2002).

Agriculture is also the most widespread user of water. Despite the critical role that women play in reducing food insecurity, through their knowledge of food production, local biodiversity, soils, and local water resources, they are often excluded from decision-making processes in new water management initiatives (The International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2007).

In North Africa and the Near East, 60-70% of all surface and groundwater is used for agriculture. Water demand is steadily increasing as a result, while water supply is steadily decreasing (The Food and Agriculture Organization, 2008).

In 2008, the Food and Agriculture Organization estimated that 1 billion people will face "dire food insecurity" over the next decade.



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Carlos Marentes of the Border Agricultural Workers Project says, "The current agricultural system destroys rural communities in the South, forcing millions to migrate, risking their lives at the border. Food sovereignty is our alternative. Instead of building walls, we should fight for healthy rural communities, so people can stay on their land, and produce their own food" ("Food Sovereignty," Grassroots International and La Via Campesina).

Emissions from agricultural activities alone account for 12-40 percent of current human-induced climate change (International Yearbook of Environmental and Resource Economics, 2001).

The best estimates for the loss of forests worldwide represents a parcel of land the size of Venezuela. Similar trends continue for the formation of deserts. This has a direct and destructive impact on our ability to produce food for a hungry world (Global Forest Assessment, 2002).

80 per cent of global carbon stocks are stored in soils and forests, and carbon released in them as a result of unsustainable agriculture and deforestation contribute significantly to climate change.

Organic agriculture is based on the effective management of local ecosystems involved in food production. Organic methods protect the environment and produce healthier food for several reasons: they reduce noxious chemicals that contribute to climate change; they store carbon in soil and build organic matter; and they minimize overall energy consumption by up to 70% (The International Organization of Agricultural Movements, 2010).



Some 20 percent of the world's dry lands are affected by human soil degradation, which puts at risk the livelihoods of more than 1 billion people (Global Environmental Outlook, 2008).

WHAT THE CHURCHES CAN DO

- Support local and regional farmers markets.
- Bring local farmers, especially women, to speak with your congregations, where they can describe their experience and express their concerns.
- Organize coalitions of farmers and church groups to educate the public and influence political decisions.
- Voice your concerns to government leaders about following the precautionary principle ("first, do no harm") in the use of genetically engineered seeds and pesticides.
- Encourage your church leaders to explore the relationships between poverty, human rights, and the environment.



BIBLE STUDY – FOOD AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

INTRODUCTION

The Bible talks of living in harmony with the land and calls for justice so all people can have secure food supplies. God is shown caring for his people, providing food for life. Sharing food was central to Jesus' ministry. He used bread as the symbol of faith, giving life to body and soul. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61 to announce his manifesto, calling for freedom and justice as we turn to God. The 'year of the Lord's favour' relates to the Old Testament concept of a Jubilee year, celebrating God's graciousness to all and showing how humanity and creation must live in harmony to ensure sustainable food for all.

This Bible study is for use by small groups or individuals, to be adapted to your own context.

LUKE 4:16-19

Jesus went to Nazareth.... He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

LEVITICUS 25: 10-19 – CELEBRATING THE JUBILEE YEAR

You shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.... you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces.... You shall not cheat one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the Lord your God. You shall observe my statutes and faithfully keep my ordinances, so that you may live on the land securely. The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live on it securely.

DISCUSSION

You may open in prayer. Read the Bible passage twice and then discuss these questions:

In biblical times:

- What do you think these passages are about? Please retell them in your own words.
- What do we learn about God's care for the most vulnerable?
- What was the idea of the Jubilee year? How did this help people live in harmony with the land?
- How would these laws help communities to have better and fairer relationships?
- It is written in Leviticus 25: 23 that God says: "The land is mine; you are but tenants" What should this mean for how humans treat the land and each other?

In our own times:

- In what ways do bad or unjust relationships within and between human societies cause hunger in our world today?
- How do human actions damage our environment and lead to hunger?
- What would you put into a Jubilee law for today – so that we produce, consume, buy, sell and share food in a just way?
- What issues can we advocate for to gain reliable daily food for all?
- What is our prayer? What practical actions can we commit to take as individuals and communities?



PRAYER

Loving Father,

We thank you for your loving care for your people and all creation. Forgive us when we have failed to seek justice and allowed others to go hungry. Forgive us when we have damaged creation and created further poverty and hunger. Give us a hunger for justice, so that all may live in harmony with the land with food, dignity and justice for all.

In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

FURTHER PASSAGES FOR READING

Genesis 41

Exodus 23:11

Luke 12: 13-21

Matthew 6: 9-13

REFERENCES AND OTHER BIBLE STUDIES

Bible: New International Version 1979

Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance:

www.e-alliance.ch/en/s/food/

www.arochoa.org

World Council of Churches:

www.oikoumene.org/en/programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/eco-justice

www.ecocongregation.org



SERMON:

FOOD & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

'OUR DAILY BREAD' John 6, 1-12

'The great community problem of our modern world is how to share bread.'

These words were said by George MacLeod, the Founder of the Iona Community in Scotland, several decades ago. The gap between the rich of the earth and the earth's poor, after thirty years of narrowing following World War Two, has been followed by thirty-five years in which it has got wider - so wide that there has never been a time in human history when it was so great, or affected so many people. Truly, Lazarus is far away.

But the gospel [John 6, 1-12: Jesus feeds the five thousand] is a vivid reminder that the problem of how to share bread is not a new one. It shows Jesus living with the huge tensions that were erupting round about him, struggling to find time and space for solitude and prayer, and yet following the movement of his heart, going out in compassion to the people who crowded round him wherever he went, full of need, full of a reawakened hope. There is a wonderful description of how everyone ate. John reads, 'they all had as much as they wanted.' It contains one of the most beautiful images in the Bible, this picture of sharing, of a basic need satisfied – and no one going hungry!

But food has become an extraordinarily complex and emotive subject, full of contradictions. Cookery books dominate the bestseller lists, there are whole television channels dedicated to programmes about cooking, restaurants, food-growing, celebrity chefs, and the interesting term, 'food pornography' has entered our dictionary.

Obesity, especially childhood obesity, is turning into a serious national epidemic. We are

confused about what constitutes healthy eating, confused by the labelling on the food we buy, confused about what the solutions might be. The emotional and psychological meanings of food are even more of a minefield; dieting, eating disorders, the role of food and meals in family and community life, the values of hospitality.

And that's before we even start on the big questions of sustainable agriculture, factory farming, climate change, energy use, resource shortages and conflicts, trade rules and global hunger. The bottom line of almost every major global problem has got food in it somewhere. So I think it's still very relevant that in the Lord's Prayer, the family prayer of the church, the first plea we make, the top of the agenda, is: 'Give us today our daily bread' Bread, of course, as well as being a real thing in itself, also stands as a symbol for other things - for homes, healthcare, work, hope, justice - all the things that Jesus was always going on about, the necessities of life, the wherewithal to sustain life.

We need to remember that food for ourselves is a material question but food for our neighbours is a spiritual one

And how does this link to the food we put on our plates? Well, it starts with what we put in our shopping trolleys. We can try to buy locally, especially supporting small farmers and producers, and helping our own local economies rather than buying products made outside of South Africa. When we do our grocery shop, we can buy a couple of extra items to donate to those in need. We could share more meals with friends and strangers. We could enjoy and give thanks for our food as a gift from God. We can cut down on junk food and eat food which is good for our bodies.

He has filled the hungry with good things... (Luke 1, 46-55)

This verse is from the Magnificat, Mary's song. Hers is the great New Testament song of liberation. She anticipates the nature of glory, and she names it and she celebrates it. This is what God's glory looks like...

*He has scattered the proud with all their plans...
He has lifted up the lowly...
He has filled the hungry with good things, and
sent the rich away
with empty hands.*

This is how it will be. Mary is the prophet of the poor, announcing the transformed social order. The spiritual realm is embedded in economic and political reality. We are promised a cosmic liberation in which the hungry will be filled with good things. If we share the anxiety and pain, we need to remember that we also share the promise of glory.

Every Eucharist service should also remind us of our commitment to share; the bread was broken to be shared.: the prophet Amos reminds us

*'I hate your religious festivals; stop your noisy songs; instead,
et justice roll like a river, and righteousness like a stream that
never runs dry.'* (Amos 5, 21 – 24)

If we get so caught up in the perfection of our own remembrance, or the beauty of our ceremonies and prayers, or our own nourishment, that we forget that people are still hungry and we are embodied with them in Christ's body, then we rather miss the point of Jesus the bread of life. The bread was broken to be shared.

When we envisage our great feast in the kingdom of God where no one goes hungry and all are satisfied, I will be happy to forgo gala banquets in favour of a simple picnic by the lake. But it will not be a true celebration until everyone is included; the street children and those who are suffering from famine as well. God give us grace to share our bread.

Revd Dr Kathy Galloway, Head of Christian Aid Scotland

Source: *Churches together in Britain and Ireland*



**Bless, O Lord,
the plants, the vegetation
and the herbs of the field,
that they may grow
and increase to fullness
and bear much fruit.
And may the fruit of the land
remind us
of the spiritual fruit we should bear.**

Coptic Orthodox liturgy, Egypt.

WATER

1.1 Billion people worldwide lack access to clean water.

1.8 million children die each year from waterborne diseases – one every 10 seconds.

5.3 billion people, two thirds of the world's population, will suffer from water shortages by 2050.

The average American family uses 293 gallons of water per day; the average African family uses 5 gallons.



In 1966, the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights established the right to water as a human right in Articles 11 and 12.

In 1999, the Dublin Conference on Water and the Environment established four principles that have subsequently guided world water policy: (1) fresh water is a finite and vulnerable resource; (2) water development and management should be based on a participatory approach, involving users, planners and policy-makers at all levels; (3) women play a central role in the provision, management, and safeguarding of water; (4) water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognized as an economic good.

Global consumption of water doubles every 20 years – more than twice the rate of human population growth.



ANGLICAN ALLIANCE
Development - Relief - Advocacy

In 2001, 800 delegates from 35 countries attended the Water for Peace and Nature Summit in Vancouver. They endorsed and signed the "Treaty Initiative to Share and Protect the Global Water Commons," which says: "the intrinsic value of the Earth's fresh water precedes its utility and commercial value," and that "the Earth's water belongs to the Earth and all species, and therefore must not be treated as a private commodity to be bought, sold, and traded for profit."

While it is obviously true that we need water for basic survival, continuing attempts to categorize water as a "need," rather than a "right" have been legal attempts to justify privatization – that is to say, companies claim that their mission is to fulfill this basic "need."



WHAT THE CHURCHES CAN DO

- Church leaders, lay and ordained, must speak directly to government representatives at all levels – local, regional, and national – about the right to safe, clean water and preserving that right as a basic public trust.
- Use the water in your baptismal font both as a sacrament and as an educational tool linking spiritual teachings, environmental stewardship practices, and basic human rights.
- Invite women in your congregation to share their experiences about the significance of water, its uses, and the issues surrounding it.
- Visit nearby wells, streams, and rivers with your congregations and communities to examine and bless the water.
- Implement water conservation strategies in your parish church or other places of worship.



BIBLE STUDY – THE RIGHT TO WATER: THE RIGHT TO LIFE

INTRODUCTION

The Bible talks repeatedly about water. The Spirit hovered over water at the beginning of creation. Water is a common theme in stories about sustaining life and communities. There are many accounts of women collecting water, including the Samaritan woman who meets Jesus at the well. In the New Testament, water becomes symbolic of new life in Christ.

In this story from Genesis 21, God provides water to save the lives of Hagar and her son, Ishmael. Hagar, a slave and a foreigner and the mother of Abraham's son, was rejected and sent out into the desert with her child.

GENESIS 21: 14-19 – GOD PROVIDES WATER TO SAVE LIFE

Thanksgiving for Earth's Bounty

Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba.

When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there, she began to sob.

God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."

Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

PRAYER

Loving Father,

We rejoice in your gift of water in creation. We give thanks for the resource of clean, safe water that sustains life. We ask your forgiveness where we have misused water supplies or not cared about others. We pray for places where people and creation suffer from lack of water. Please guide humanity to come together to preserve and share water for the life and flourishing of all.

In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

DISCUSSION

You may open in prayer. Read the Bible passage twice and then discuss these questions:

In biblical times:

- What do you think this passage is about? Please retell it in your own words.
- What factors made Hagar so powerless in this situation?
- What did Hagar experience when her son was dying of thirst?
- How did God respond to the suffering of this foreign female slave?



- What do we learn from this story about God's care for the most vulnerable?

In our own times:

- What do we recognise from this story in our world today? What is our prayer?
- God showed particular concern for the most vulnerable; a woman and a child who were enslaved foreigners. Who are the most vulnerable in our communities and world? How should the Church respond?
- Discuss some specific situations and consider why people are denied the right to enough water and clean water.
- "Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5:24) What does justice mean in relation to water access in our world? Do we help or harm others in our personal use of water?
- What practical actions can we commit to take at individual and community level to change our own practices and to advocate for the right to water?

FURTHER PASSAGES FOR READING

John 4: 5-15

Amos 5: 12-13, 24

REFERENCES AND OTHER BIBLE STUDIES

Bible text cited from New International Version 1979

Ecumenical Water Network:

<http://www.olkoumene.org/en/activities/ewn-home>

www.tearfund.org/en/what_we_do_and_where/issues/water_and_sanitation

www.wateraid.org/uk

www.arocha.org

SERMON:

WATER

'Waters of life - Enough for all!'

Isaiah 55:1, 10-13, 1 Peter 3: 18-21,
Rev. 7:16-17, John 4:4-15

God's great and wonderful gift of water is so necessary for both our bodies and our souls. Without water there is no life. Nothing can survive, grow and flourish without water.

It is not surprising, then, that water is a very significant image in the Bible. Throughout the Old Testament, we learn that God provides his creation and us human beings with an abundance of waters. As a matter of fact, the earth could be called 'The Water Planet' since it consists of so much water. Even our own bodies consist of more than 70 % water! The river from Eden (in present day devastated Iraq?) flowed abundantly and supplied the garden with plenty of fresh and healthy water.

The Psalms and the Proverbs and other books in the Bible also tell us about this wonderful abundance. Our text from Isaiah speaks about its life-giving abundance to sustain agriculture and food for the whole creation. It is clear that God provides us with enough water - even in a desert situation of Biblical lands. We human beings must recognize God as the giver of all water. If we stop doing that, it will have serious effects. We will suffer the consequence of our own ignorance with polluted water and an unliveable environment. Already in the Old Testament it is clear that this abundant supply of water requires planning and care from the side of human beings. Obedience and worship of God are necessary for us to have enough water. God's economy is always an economy of abundance, but also stewardship.

After the Israelites follow Moses into the desert, they doubt God's abundance and complain to Moses that they are being brought into the wilderness to die of thirst. Moses strikes the rock with his shaft and waters flow out of the rock.

The abundance of Exodus and Numbers has a simple formula. Worship God above all and you will have all that you need. "You shall worship God and I will bless your bread and your water" Exodus 23:25. Numbers 24:7 promises, "water shall flow from his [Israel's] buckets and his offspring shall have abundant water."

Many Psalms and Proverbs remind us of God's bountiful gift of water and our need to share that gift. Proverbs 25:21 reminds us that the one who gives water will get water.

For Christians, water certainly has both a direct real importance and a deep spiritual significance. Jesus is concerned with both!

Jesus' discussion with the Samaritan woman in the gospel for today deals with both these aspects of water. Jesus and the woman met at a deep well in Sychar. It was not a water tank or other device for gathering water. It was the ancient well of the city, well known by all, cared for and respected by all, since all the inhabitants of the city were totally dependent on it. It was probably surrounded by some sheltering trees with its roots deep down in the moist of the soil close to the well. Out of this well of Sychar came fresh and living water, gushing forth out of the depths.

The dialogue in this gospel text moves from ordinary water to the thirst for depth within us, a place where we can anchor our whole life, for ultimate meaning and satisfaction. All our thirst is a thirst within a greater one - for God! As he tells the woman at the well: "Those who drink the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I give them will become a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." (John 4:14) What a beautiful image! The simple gift of water on earth becomes the sacred gift of God from heaven - to cleanse, heal and transform both our bodies and our souls.

Why is it that Christians today have so much trouble making the connection between the physical and spiritual aspects of water? How can we read all these things about water in the Bible and not see any relation to the alarming state of water all around us in the world?

Despite the abundance of water on the Earth, we humans have done a poor job of taking care of it. We abuse it for other purposes. We are diverting rivers and streams unnecessarily, we poison it, and waste it, indifferent to the consequences: too many people, too little water, water in the wrong places and in the wrong amounts. 1.2 billion people in the world do not have access to clean safe drinking water, and 2.4 billion do not have adequate sanitation due to polluted waters.

The World Council of Churches recently found out that 80% of all disease in poor countries is related to poor drinking water and poor sanitation. As much as 40% of the world's population goes thirsty every year nowadays, with some countries consuming more and more while others get less and less. Women and children in East Africa now walk an average of 21 minutes for each trip to collect water.

Jesus came that all human beings might have life and have it abundantly. He clearly showed throughout his life that he cares both about our spiritual and physical well being. Abundant life is a combined spiritual and physical reality. The one who is touched by his Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love, the fountain of living water cannot close their eyes to the physical water situation of the world. "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters: and you that have no money come buy and eat!" (Isaiah 55:1) What could we do in our congregation to make this become a reality in the full sense of 'abundant life for all?' Here are some practical suggestions:

- We need to repent of our uncaring ways and attitudes towards creation and the natural environment in general and today in particular towards God's wonderful gift of water.
- Do not use bottled water, rather use tap water. Tap water in South Africa is completely safe to drink.
- Participate in a beach or river clean up.
- Do not use running water for rinsing the dishes when you are washing up.
- Install a water-saving showerhead, and choose to shower rather than bath

Source World Council of Churches



Creating God, your name is written in every leaf, every bird, every river, every stone, every living being.

Thank you for calling us by name.

Thank you for your continued creating power in water, rivers, forests and oceans.

Make us attentive to the wounds of the earth and willing to work for the healing of the whole creation.

Let our children enjoy an abundant nature and live a long life on earth.

2003 LWF Assembly in Winnipeg.



SUSTAINABILITY: ENERGY AS GODS GIFT

Energy is a gift from God as part of his creation but one we hardly notice... until there's a power cut! But one in five people in the world has no access to electricity at all and two in five rely on burning anything from wood to animal excrement for cooking and heating and the fumes damage their health: two million a year die as a result

2012 is the United Nations Year of Sustainable Energy for All, with a target of giving the whole world reliable and clean energy by 2030. We need to make radical changes to move away from electricity which is generated by fossil fuels which cause climate change and are becoming increasingly expensive. We also need to move to greater efficiency and lower consumption. Renewable sources of energy (green energy) also create more jobs than fossil fuels.

Currently the majority of energy comes from burning fossil fuels, either directly or to generate electricity. This emits carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, which we know to be causing global warming and climate change. We are already at substantial risk of exceeding the 2 degree Celsius rise beyond which it is generally believed dangerous effects will occur.

Oil, gas and coal were created over millions of years and there is only a limited amount available on the planet. Although we are not going to run out of any of them completely in the

near future, we have certainly discovered and extracted the bulk of the easily accessible and high quality supplies. This is why we're drilling for oil and gas in increasingly deep water, surveying the Arctic, and starting to extract from the Alberta tar sands and through oil fracking, at relatively high environmental and economic cost. Trends in coal are similar but less advanced.

Many argue that we cannot continue to produce oil and gas in the quantities we do currently, but even if we can, the combination of increased extraction costs and increased demand by countries such as India and China means that the trend of increased energy prices we've seen in recent years is going to increase, putting the cost beyond the reach of the poorest in the world.

Cleaner cooking can be provided by supplying stoves that run on electricity, solar power, or smokeless fuels such as propane and charcoal pellets. (Although these still produce CO₂, they produce less than traditional methods, due to greater efficiency.)

What does this have to do with us?
It combines three principles of our Christian life and relationship with God:

- Care for God's creation: we should care about the effects that our energy use is having on the planet God has given us to live on and look after.
- Care for God's people: we should care for the poor and suffering, and be concerned for the injustice that some in the world have little access to energy while others use vast amounts.
- Wise use of what God has given us: energy is a gift from God for our benefit and enjoyment. Is our use of it faithful to him, or are we being wasteful?

As Christians, we have responsibilities both to care for the poor and to care for the planet. So we need to be aware of the issues and know what we can do both as individuals and as churches.

It's very easy to take energy for granted. Without thinking about it we'll plug something in, flick a switch, turn on the gas or start the car and expect something to happen. Only on the rare occasions that something goes wrong do we realise just how dependent we are.

The United Nations have made 2012 Sustainable Energy for All year, with two goals:

- Everyone in the world should have access to clean electricity and heating. A consequence of all this burning is fumes which damage people's health, and also pollute the wider environment.
- The world should move to sustainable energy: our use of fossil fuels is also polluting and causing climate change.

As Christians, we have an additional insight. All this energy originates ultimately in God's creation of sun, moon and Earth. And he gives us vastly more, in solar radiation hitting the earth, than we can currently use. Our bible passage will help us reflect on this.



WHAT THE CHURCHES CAN DO

An electricity fast: Take a day to live using no electricity, or as little as possible. Reflect on how different this day was.

Be thankful: Each time you use energy, whether electricity, gas, driving a car, or using something that has taken energy to produce, take the opportunity to thank God for what his gift of energy has enabled you to do.

Energy efficiency and consumption: Think about how you can cut your electricity usage. Some suggestions are: using a 'wonder box', only filling your kettle with as much water as you need, making sure you put the lids on pots, turn off the oven ten minutes before your food is ready, use energy saving light bulbs, turn your geyser down to 50 degrees and use a blanket, turn off heaters and wear more layers, keep your car serviced and the tyres inflated. Use teleconferencing, form a lift club...

Share ideas with other members of the congregation.



BIBLE STUDY – SUSTAINABLE ENERGY: ENERGY AS GOD'S GIFT

BIBLE REFLECTION - READ PSALM 146

- God creates everything and provides for us. Can we expect as much energy as we like? Why or why not?
- How do we reconcile verses 7-9 with all we've talked about?
- Do we have a role in providing the poor with energy, and if so what?
- Given that God is the ultimate source of energy, what does that say about how we use it?

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRAYER

Thank God for his gift of energy and that we have plenty. Pray for those who are without, and for efforts to give them a better future.

BIBLE REFLECTION -
READ GENESIS 1:26-30

- This well-known passage doesn't mention energy directly, but what conclusions can we draw?
- The earth is given to all of humanity, past, present and future. But ... "Humanity always wants a free lunch, but isn't prepared to do the washing up so that someone else can have a meal later." Is this true, why is it true, and can we do anything about it?
- Can it ever be right to use our increasingly scarce resources for unnecessary things? (e.g. TV, entertainment, electronic devices for that do things we could do by hand, etc.)

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRAYER

Thank God for what we can do with electricity. Pray for wisdom for our leaders and those in energy companies as they try to meet the challenging sustainability targets.

BIBLE REFLECTION - READ ISAIAH 58

This chapter is often quoted when talking about helping the poor and social injustice issues generally, but in the original context it is as much about wider lack of community.

- What three things are the Israelites called to do? (See verses 6, 7, 9a.)
- How might these apply to the issue of sustainable energy and the reasons why many still live in energy poverty?
- Are there any limits to our obligations? What is “poor” and do we need to help everyone who has less energy access than us? What would be the practical consequences if we did succeed in getting them all to our own level of consumption?
- Does this passage advocate that we should “fast from energy use”, whatever that might mean in practice?



SERMON:

SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

James 1:17-27

Song of Solomon 2:8-13

When faced with a flat packed piece of furniture to assemble I am always tempted to ignore the maker's instructions, thinking that I know how best to do it. The consequence of persisting with my way of doing this frequently results in a lopsided wardrobe and various screws left over that don't appear to fit anywhere.

As a human race this is often our way of operating; devising our own rules and ways rather than obeying God's commands. The consequences for human beings and the natural world have been devastating. Wendell Berry claims that "our destruction of nature is not just bad stewardship, or stupid economics, or a betrayal of family responsibility; it is the most horrid blasphemy."

Deuteronomy 4 is set at the edge of the Promised Land, with the people of God poised to enter. They are on the border both geographically and theologically. It is vital therefore that they get it right for the sake of themselves and coming generations (v9). The writer implores the people to follow the decrees and laws taught by God, not as a strait jacket but as means of ensuring human flourishing. These are guidelines for godly living that will allow a good life for the people of God through the generations and for the rest of the created order. Possession of this land flowing with milk and honey, that is a place of great natural and spiritual richness, is a wonderful opportunity to be celebrated. It is also a gift of God requiring stewardship. Therefore our responsibility is to 'be careful and watch yourselves so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart' (Deut 4:9). Central to this human flourishing is the need to remember

continually that it is not theirs by right but the land is a gift (v1). It is when we assume possession is by right rather than gift that we enter into an exploitative relationship with the land.

Further exploration of Deuteronomy and the rest of the Torah gives hints and indications of how closely aligned to God's commandments are the concepts of creation care and sustainability, for example preservation of fruit trees in the times of war (Deut. 20:19-20).

Jesus takes this theme up in addressing the Pharisees in **Mark 7**. He urges them, who thought that they were faithfully following God stipulations, to look again at both the bigger picture and more closely at the heart of the matter. So caught up in seeming to do the right thing and ticking the religious boxes, they had lost sight of God's real purposes.

The observance of Corban (v 11) was a sophisticated way of pretending to do one's duty to God whilst neglecting those who needed help. Jesus continues in the long line of Old Testament prophets and is unabashed in his condemnation, labelling those who do this 'hypocrites' (v 6). 'You have let go of the commands of God and are holding to the traditions of people' (v8). In these words Jesus holds up a mirror to our own hearts both individually and as a nation. Do we play religion or do we live in a way that makes the call of God on our lives to love God and love our neighbour our primary concern?

This call to love God and to love our neighbour has implications on how we steward the God-given natural resources of the earth. Are they used to help the poorest and the neediest? The temptation is to cry 'Corban', and to carry on concentrating on our internal church life and church buildings whilst neglecting the marginalized. The effects of climate change and environmental degradation fall hardest on the poorest of the world. Creation care and working for sustainability is an integral part of the dual obedience of caring for the poor and looking after God's good earth. Sustainable energy is an example of this dual obedience; for example the United Nations aim to promote and provide clean stoves provides a key need for some of the most marginalized poor people

on the planet whilst at the same time helps to preserve the natural habitat around them. This is an attempt to love God through helping sustain the resources of the natural world.

James 1:17-27. The epistle for the day is one of the starkest and most challenging passages of the New Testament. It is also in many ways one of the simplest and clearest. James is quite explicit that real religion is a matter not so much of orthodoxy but of orthopraxis, not just believing the right thing but doing the right thing as well. Looking after widows and orphans, in other words the poorest of this society and of any society, is not an optional extra for Christians. Simply saying 'stay warm, eat well' is not what Christians are called to do. Our calling is to be part of the solution and help provide warmth and stoves and food. That is how James would understand true religion.

"If in piety the church says, 'The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof' and in fact is no different in thought and action from the general community, who will be drawn to her word and worship to 'come and see' that her work or salvation has any meaning?

*Source: Churches together in Britain and Ireland.
Rev. Mike Gilbert.*



A morning prayer

Show us how to do things well today,
so that others may not suffer,
here or there,
now or in the future.

Show us how to make
our contribution
as we change the way we live,
travel, make and consume,
pack and unpack,
use, misuse and re use energy,
heating and lighting.

Show us how to do simple things
well in our home,
places of work and lifestyle choices.
Show us how to protect the world
you made,
in all its diversity and goodness,
from our carbon emissions,
global warming and climate change,
rising temperatures and sea levels,
the displacement of peoples,
environmental poverty,
harm and destruction.

Show us how and show us why,
so that alone and with others
our contribution will
make a difference.

Amen

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BIODIVERSITY: ST FRANCIS DAY



The Community of All Creation

What is biodiversity?

This is a technical term for the variety of life on Earth. It refers not just to the diversity of species of plants, animals, fungi, bacteria etc, but also to the variety within any one species and to the various ways species live together in ecosystems.

Why does biodiversity matter?

Many people feel delight in the diversity itself and want to preserve it for its own sake and for its beauty and inspirational value. There is also a sense of preserving genetic diversity so that future generations can draw on it as a resource, e.g. for new drugs in medicine or resistance to pests in crop plants.

Biodiversity is also important because it:

- is crucial for sources of food, fuel and energy,
- is needed to regulate the Earth's atmosphere,
- is essential for pollination, waste-disposal, pollution control, agriculture and clean water.

Why is it important to Christians?

The accounts of the Creation in the early chapters of Genesis emphasise the delight God takes in his Creation. More specifically in Genesis 2.15 Adam is instructed to 'till and care for' the earth and many modern interpreters take this in a strong sense that we are accountable to God for the care we take over our fellow creatures and our shared world. Currently, human activities are destroying biodiversity at alarming rates and these losses are irreversible.

In the biblical view the earth and all that fills it comprise a community. One of the basic errors of our culture is to separate humanity from the rest of creation. The very term 'the environment' suggests that we are a separate entity, while everything else is 'out there'. In the Genesis account of creation, humans and other creatures are formed together (Genesis 1:24-31). Humans, endowed with a special calling and special privileges, have a pivotal role in the development and well-being of creation. When we fail, all creation suffers.

Correspondingly, the redemption of creation awaits the full redemption of human beings (Romans 8:18-23). We are called to do two things – to help to save the species that he has created, and to turn from the arrogance and idolatry that incurs his judgment.

Some people think that the disappearance of natural species doesn't really matter that much. In planning matters, economy often is more important than ecology. Partly as a result of such a mindset, we are living through the sixth great extinction in the history of the Earth – and the first to be caused by humans. The current rate of extinction is said to be 100 or even 1,000 times above the natural level. A true sense of the value of God's creation would cause us to repent of such callous disregard.

In our globalised economy, greedy and abusive trading practices dispossess both people and natural species. Destruction of tropical forests assaults both indigenous races and wildlife. Trade in ivory and 'bushmeat' threaten elephants and primates. Sometimes forests are destroyed by people who are themselves desperate for land in order to feed themselves and their families. In many cases demand from the rich nations drives the exploitation both of people and of the natural world. For instance the demand for fish has depleted stocks worldwide. Thus in our world oppression of the poor, such as is denounced by Amos in his time, is inseparable from the destruction of species and ecosystems. Rather than just feeling guilty, we can take practical and political actions towards fair and ecologically responsible trade.

BIBLE STUDY – BIODIVERSITY

Read together: Job 38:1-27
(Ideally use 'The Message' – a fresh, modern version)

Questions for reflection and discussion

- Why does nature flourish? What does Job suggest about this?
- What images does Job 38 use to describe God's work in creation?

(Answers include designer / architect / parent / ruler / provider)

- What do these tell us about God's character?
- What other attributes of God's character have people seen in their own experience of nature?
- What does Job 38:25-27 suggest about whom creation is for? Is it only for people?
- How does human behaviour today inhibit creation from flourishing?
- What are the root causes of this – where have we gone wrong?
- How do we need to re-orientate ourselves to regain the perspective of Job 38?
What might this mean for:
 - our priorities?
 - our lifestyles?
 - our church-life?
 - our work-life?
- Pray for areas of the world that are suffering the effects of Climate Change and biodiversity loss.
- Pray for those who work in the environmental & conservation sectors.
- Pray for Christian organisations which are seeking to care for God's world
- Pray for God's Church worldwide to recover the foundational importance of creation care in its worship and mission.

Source (Rev Nigel Cooper : Churches together in Britain and Ireland)

SERMON:

BIODIVERSITY

Good News for All Creation

At the end of St Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says to his disciples "Go and share the good news with all creation." All creation. The task of believers is not simply to go and communicate a few ideas to a few promising human beings, it is to transform the face of the earth. We are to be the bearers of good news for the world that God has made. Not for any one little bit of it, for any one community at the expense of others. Not even it seems for humanity at the expense of everything else in the universe. Good news for all creation.

And that is why we're here, to ask today what is going to be good news for creation? It looks in the last few decades particularly and perhaps the last few millennia as if the human race has on the whole not been very good news for the rest of creation.

And that's catching up with us, catching up with us in terms of its practical effects. We are seeing pollution of our oceans, loss of biodiversity, and increase of hunger.

We are more and more beginning to realise how we have turned our back on that command of the risen Lord, to be and to carry good news for all of his world. We need to ask God to rally us and unite us and inspire us around a vision of universal good news, which is justice for creation and justice for God's human children also. These two things are inseparable.

We do not have to make some kind of choice between looking after human beings and looking after the planet. We are as human beings, in case you haven't noticed, creatures. In Job 38:18 we can find that wonderful reminder of where we stand in creation. God says to Job with unforgettable fatherly sarcasm "Have you comprehended the expanse of the Earth? Declare if you know all this." So we are part of a great interwoven system of life. We live because we are creatures. We depend on the health of the world around us. And because of that, the health of the world around us and our own long-term health are not two things but one. Let's not lose sight of that.

Sadly, we hear all too often how climate change is affecting the most vulnerable communities on the earth. Of our failure to attend to the health and wellbeing of creation, the failure to share good news with creation itself.

St Paul's words in the Letter to the Romans 8:19-21

"For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God".

Hold that vision with enormous clarity and power. When human beings are healed of their sin and their fear, when human beings find their healing, their deliverance from selfishness and greed and anxiety it begins to make a mysterious difference to everything. You begin to see that God's purpose for the whole creation is glory for all that is made in which human beings share with all other things. Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Somehow our deliverance into joy and thanksgiving, into reconciliation with God and one another spills over into the reconciliation and the transfiguration of the whole world we're in. Our liberation is the world's liberation. Good news for us should be good news for the whole of God's world. So for us to be sharing good news with the whole human race and the whole world in which and from which it lives, is for us to be set free first of all. Set free from the myth that somehow human beings really exist somewhere else than in the world as it truly is. That somehow we're in charge. That somehow this is given to us to use as we wish, as if we were not embodied but disembodied.

We need to be delivered from that, we need to be delivered not only from untruth but from fear. The fear that if we take steps of courage and generosity in relation to the world and to one another somehow we will make ourselves a little bit less comfortable.

This is not about fear; this is not about all of us as Christians saying to the rest of the human race "It's time to panic. Worry harder." Because mysteriously that doesn't actually change very much. What we have to say is in the sharing of good news there is life for us, life for our neighbours, life for the creation in which God has

placed us. And that is something for joy not fear. So please, let's focus on the thanksgiving and the wonder of the gift we've been given in our universe. And the gift of faith, perspective, courage, spirit filled vision that is ours.

Back to Job again. "Who determined the measurements of the Earth, who stretched the line upon it? On what were its basis sunk? Who laid its cornerstone? When the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy." Now that is where our passion for creation comes from. It's the singing of the heavenly beings; it's the morning stars rejoicing. It's creation as a gift for which we must be grateful. A gift in whose life and for whose life we must act not out of fear but out of love, out of generosity. And out of the hope of that freedom of the glory of the children of God.

"Go..." says Jesus "...share the good news with every creature, with everything that has been made. We have been privileged to hear good news and so we renew our commitment to speak that good news courageously in a world so appallingly hungry for it. To speak good news to the poorest and the most vulnerable, to speak good news to the creation abused and exploited by us.

If the God of Job and the Lord Jesus Christ and St Paul are right then our witness in this respect truly is a sign of our liberation. And a sign of hope in the world.
May it be so..

*By Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury.
Source: Churches together in Britain and Ireland.*



Good Lord, most High Almighty,
to you all praise is due,
all glory, honour, blessing,
belong alone to you;
there is no man whose lips
are fit to frame your name.

Be praised then, my Lord God,
in and through all your creatures
especially among them,
through noble Brother Sun,
by whom you light the day;
in his radiant splendid beauty
he reminds us, Lord, of you.

Be praised, my Lord.
Through Sister Moon and all the stars;
you have made the sky shine in their lovely light.

In Brother Wind be praised, my Lord,
and in the air,
in clouds, in calm,
in all the weather moods that cherish life.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Water;
she is most useful, humble, precious, pure.
And Brother Fire, by whom you lighten night;
how fine is he, how happy, powerful, strong.

Through our dear Mother Earth be praised, my Lord,
she feeds us, guides us, gives us plants, bright flowers
and all her fruits.

Be praised, my Lord, through us,
when out of love for you
we pardon one another.
When we endure
in sickness and in sorrow.
Blessed are they who preserve in peace;
from you, Most High, they will receive their prize.

Be praised, my Lord, praised for our Sister Death,
from whom no man alive can hope to hide;
wretched are they who die deep in their sin.
And blessed those, Death finds doing your will.
For them there is no further death to fear.

O people! Praise God and bless him,
give him thanks
and serve him most humbly.

*The Canticle of the Creatures - St. Francis of Assisi;
translation by Molly Reidy
Reproduced by ECEN for Creation Time 2001*

BLESSING OF ANIMALS

Saint Francis day

Concerning the Occasion

Animals are a vital part of the creation of which human beings have been given stewardship. They provide us with companionship, and in some cases assist in independent daily living. The rite which follows is intended for use when it is desired to give thanks and to pray for God's blessing on pets and other domestic animals. It is anticipated that a significant number of children will be present, and their participation and leadership should be encouraged. Portions of this material may be incorporated into the Sunday Eucharist of a congregation..

Intercessions and Thanksgivings

Leader: We thank you, God, for the gift of life: for the beauty and wonder of creation, and for our own

life which comes from you.

People: **Glory to you for ever and ever.**

Leader: We thank you for the richness of animal life: for fish and birds, insects, reptiles, and mammals.

People: **Glory to you for ever and ever.**

Leader: We thank you for the animals who give us faithful companionship, joy when we are happy and comfort when we are sad.

People: **Glory to you for ever and ever.**

Leader: We thank you for calling us to care for these animals. May we learn love and respect for all living things.

People: **Glory to you for ever and ever.**

The priest says the prayer of blessing.

Blessed are you, living, loving God.

All creation praises you,

yet you have given the earth into our hands.

You made animals as our companions,
that in caring for them
we might learn to love and care
for all your creatures,
and find in them a sign of your grace.
As we fulfil this calling
may we draw close to you,
the giver of all life,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The animals are blessed

The service may continue at the Peace

From Canadian Book of Occasional Services

Reader: The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof,
the world and all that dwells therein.

All: We live in God's world, we are not alone.
We share this life with the heavens and the earth,
with the waters and the land,
with trees and grasses,
with fish, birds, and animals,
with creatures of every form,
and with all our brothers and sisters.

Reader: God saw all that was made, and behold,
it was very good.

*Source: A Service of Worship - The Earth Is the Lord's,
United Church of Canada*

Reproduced by ECEN for Creation Time 2003

CHILDRENS ACTIVITIES

Invite the children to close their eyes and picture their favourite place in the world. Now think of one thing each one of us could do to take care of this world e.g. recycling, wasting less water, switching off electrical appliances instead of leaving on stand by, not dropping litter etc. Even the small changes we all make can make a difference. In pairs or individually, ask the children to produce posters, either showing small changes we could all make to care for our world, or celebrating the world's biodiversity. Put these posters up around the church or building.

Make a green colour strip

Take the children out to collect as many different green leaves as possible or provide these for them. Put a strip of double sided sticky tape on a piece of white card and arrange the leaves (or parts of the leaves if too big) in colour order from lightest green through to darkest green onto the tape. This gives a colour strip showing something of the diversity of plants in the local environment.

Leaf collage

Draw a large leaf shape on an A4 piece of paper. Fill the leaf shape with as many different leaves found in the local environment glued on using PVA glue as a collage of plant diversity.

Psalm of praise

Read Psalm 8 to the children. Using a large sheet of paper, create a "thought shower" of things in the natural world that the children would like to give thanks to God for. These might include favourite places, animals, food etc. Then, scribe the children's Psalm of praise beginning and ending with, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" And including the children's suggestions in the main body of the "Psalm". Read the joint piece of work together. Use this Psalm in church next week.

Story Board

Read the story of creation from Genesis 1 to the group. You may prefer to use a children's version of the Bible or The Message for this. Provide an A3 piece of paper divided into six squares to the children, to work on in pairs or individually. Ask the children to draw the creation story in each of the boxes to represent the six days of creation, reminding them that the seventh day was a day of rest.

Creation Cube

Read the story of creation from Genesis 1 to the group. You may prefer to use a children's version of the Bible or The Message for this. Provide the children with a cube net (template) on A4 card. On each face of the cube, draw one of the six days of creation. Cut out and make up the cube. Each toss of the cube will remind the children of a different aspect of the creation story.

Flower collage pen pots

Provide the children with pictures of flowers from gardening magazines or seed catalogues etc and a cardboard cup. Use PVA glue to cover the cup with the flower pictures, which can then be used as a pen holder. As the children make the flower collage pen pots, discuss the diversity of plants in the world.

Wildlife garden

Use a corner of the church garden, a window box or large plant pot to sow some wildflower seeds for the children to create and care for their own wildlife garden. Talk about the importance of providing the right environment for bees and other wildlife, how we depend on bees for pollination, the importance of supporting native species etc.

Creation musical

Listen to the story of creation. Either make musical instruments out of junk or use percussion instruments to produce a soundtrack for each aspect of the creation story. Reread the story with the children playing their music.

ADDITIONAL LITURGICAL MATERIALS

Blessing

Deep peace of the running wave to you,
deep peace of the flowing air to you,
deep peace of the quiet earth to you,
deep peace of the shining stars to you,
deep peace of the Son of Peace to you.

Amen.

Gaelic blessing, from Words and Songs of Reconciliation and Praise, Graz, 1997)

Sending forth

Leader:

Go forth now to care for God's world.
Use energy wisely. Share your knowledge.
Sacrifice where necessary. Live in harmony with all creation.
Go out into all the world as prophets of a new way of living
and preach the good news to all creation.
And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Be with us all now and always.

All: Amen.

From Prayers for the Planet, at a service at Hinde Street Methodist Church, London, before the Climate March, December 2005

Reading on food and environmental justice

Psalm 65 v1a, 9-13 Good News Bible:

O God, it is right for us to praise you...
You show your care for the land by sending rain;
you make it rich and fertile.
You fill the streams with water;
you provide the earth with crops.
This is how you do it:
you send abundant rain on the ploughed fields
and soak them with water;
you soften the soil with showers
and cause the young plants to grow.
What a rich harvest your goodness provides!
Wherever you go there is plenty.
The pastures are filled with flocks;
the hillsides are full of joy.
The fields are covered with sheep;
the valleys are full of wheat.
Everything shouts and sings for joy.

A litany for sustainable energy

Creator God, you have generously blessed us with an abundance of gifts in this, your world. Help us to share in that generosity by living in a way that ensures that your gifts will continue to be available for future generations.

O God, give us your love for the whole of Creation

Creator God, we rejoice that, as human beings, we have been created in your image and likeness. But we also recognise that humanity alone cannot adequately reflect you. The whole diversity of the earth is needed to give us even a glimpse of your wonder and greatness. Help us to live in a sustainable way so that this marvellous diversity is respected.

O God, give us your love for the whole of Creation

Creator God, we live in a world where some of us throw out food while others go to bed hungry; where some have the modern amenities of life at their disposal and others struggle to find drinking water. May we learn to share with one another and, in this way, come to share in your generosity to all.

O God, give us your love for the whole of Creation

Creator God, the sun, the wind and the waves are your gifts for the flourishing of the whole community of life on earth. Help us to use them creatively to produce sustainable energy for all.

O God, give us your love for the whole of Creation

Through scientists, engineers and scholars new knowledge comes to light; may new developments in the production of sustainable energy protect our fragile planet and promote the well-being of all peoples and all creatures on their journey to wholeness.

O God, give us your love for the whole of Creation

We pray for the United Nations, for all international, national and local leaders and for managers of companies that they may be guided by your Spirit to make wise decisions about sources of sustainable energy for all.

O God, give us your love for the whole of Creation

Creator God, You have blessed humankind with understanding, imagination and memory. Show us how to learn from past mistakes and plan for the future creatively and responsibly.

O God, give us your love for the whole of Creation

Priest/leader

Let us pray: Create in us a new heart and a new vision, O God, that the gifts of Your Spirit may work in us and renew the face of the earth. May we be one with you so that our work is yours and your work is ours. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who lives with you and with the Holy Spirit for ever.

Amen

(Source: Churches together in Britain and Ireland – resources for creation time)

We give you thanks, most gracious God, for the beauty
of the earth and sky and sea;
for the richness of mountains, plains, and rivers;
for the songs of birds and the loveliness of flowers.
We praise you for these good gifts
and pray that we may safeguard them for our posterity.
Grant that we may continue to grow in our grateful
enjoyment of your abundant creation,
to the honor and glory of your name, now and forever.

*(Source: The Book of Common Prayer;
Church Publishing, New York)*

