

Sheffield United Reformed Churches
Team Ministry worship for individuals or a family
Sunday 11th July 2021 at 10:30 am.

Call to worship

Through the warmth of the sun and the blessing of rain; with all that has breath we give glory to God! As the sun and the moon shape the day and the night; so we children of earth tend and care where we live. Through fire, through water we pass on our way: Bring us refreshment today!

Hymn MP 200

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father
There is no shadow of turning with Thee
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be

*Great is Thy faithfulness, great is Thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me*

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love

Great is Thy faithfulness...

Opening Prayers

Sustaining God today, the stones are shouting for the Lord's disciples have been silent. Today the cycles of the seasons which tell of your faithfulness are gagged and stifled. Today the very skies which tell of your glory the glaciers which reflect and protect and the seas which you put in their place are all in wounded turmoil longing simply to praise you. Yet we have locked these voices out and with them the voice of humanity

For those who are hurt first and worst by emergencies, not just of climate but the injustice on which our human societies have come to rely. For what those who are well off do to the poor. Our species does to the Earth as a whole. We acknowledge our part, and our knowing silence in these and more of the tings which affect our lives today.

We think about some of the challenges which we face Food waste; Biodiversity loss; Plastic pollution; Deforestation; Air pollution; Mismanaged agriculture and factory farming; Global warming from fossil fuels; Melting icecaps Food and water insecurity.

Sustaining God, as in Christ you enter with mercy, energy and compassion in to the life of the Earth speaking out wherever creatures are out of place o lost. Shout with the stones, call us to account show us the power we have and how we continue to misuse it. Set us free from imagined responsibilities to keep things as they have been and show us, with the energy of forgiveness the path of healing for heaven and earth.

Let us confess our sins to God: and put behind us, what we need carry no longer, that God's hope and grace might heal what have broken in God's world. May our praise join the chorus of all that has breath with aloud shout of challenge for we are your people.

Your people forgiven, your people committed for the healing of the Earth by God's grace alone -
Amen

Readings



2 Samuel 5: 1-5, 9-10 – David gathered all the chosen men of Israel...

Psalms 24 – The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it...

Mark 6: 14-29 – Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man.

Ephesians 1:3 -14 – In Christ, we have redemption through his blood.

Reflection

We are being encouraged to hold a Climate Sunday services before the 5th September 2021. As most of our churches will not be back to in person worship before then, I was wondering if today could be our Climate Sunday.

During the service we are asked to do two things. Firstly, to *commit* to take the next steps as a local church community to reduce our own greenhouse gas emissions and become an eco-church. Secondly, we are asked to *speak up* by signing the Climate Coalition 'The Time is Now' declaration as a church, calling on our government to act and work towards a healthier, greener, fairer future.

It would be good as we emerge from lockdown that we emerge a greener, healthier church. At our last Steering Group we had an excellent presentation from Bob Prestwood about St Luke's (Lodgemoor) journey through lockdown and one of key challenges he echoed for us was to try and *reimagine* church. So let's look at some of the theology around emerging as a green church.

The story of the Bible is ultimately the story of the reconciliation, redemption and restoration for all of creation. As we journey through this story, let us discover more about our Creator and God's heart for all that has been created. And, as people made in God's image, may we understand more of how we can join in with God's redemptive plan. Everything is connected – video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-terQL6RO0>

So let's start in Genesis and the story which offers us an account of creation. I am a fan of trees and we see where they appear in the creation story (Gen 1:11) Just to digress - how many times trees appear in the Bible – including first page of Genesis, first Psalm, and last page of Revelation. Trees get a mention more in the Bible than any other living being other than people and God.

Some Bible characters associated with trees: Adam, Abraham, Moses, and Zacchaeus. A few weeks ago we talked about Jesus sharing a parable of what the kingdom of God is like. He described a mustard seed, which grows into a large tree, and Psalms and Jeremiah both describe a tree planted by streams of water – this demonstrates the importance and benefits of trees.

This story of creation shows us what an incredible, complicated and beautiful place the earth is. We are asked to care for it, to make sure that natural balance is maintained, but climate change is a result of our failure to do this: affecting the make-up of our atmosphere, the temperature of our waters, the ecosystems and demand for certain foods putting pressure on the natural world. We need to nurture this fragile balance. Genesis tells us that we are made in God's image, reflecting his nature so that we can be responsible for the very good world he has created.

Amongst the many laws of the Old Testament is the importance of Sabbath – for the land as well as for God's people. You may notice a bit of a theme running through here that when we think of things like the Sabbath, we think a day of rest for (the Ministers) humans. Did anyone think of a day of rest for the land or maybe the creatures in the sea? The principle in the Hebrew text is highlighted the importance of not overworking the land, but also to let it lie fallow and resting the animals.

The story takes us on to the Psalm which is full of praise and our Psalm this morning is no different as it lifts up praise to God. The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness: It wasn't enough for David to say that the entire earth belonged to the LORD; he added that all its fullness also belonged to Him. It's difficult to think of a more sweeping statement of God's ownership. The Psalms are full of praise for the Creator and his creation. Praise God for his creation through what you can see around you today. As part of our journey together let us ask God to reveal more of himself to us through his world.

The Gospel of John gives us a view of the incarnate Christ putting down roots in the world he created. As we read on we come to John 3:16. There was a point in time when this verse was splashed around on billboards. John 3:16 was arguably the most famous verse of the Bible. It was one of the first verses I learnt in Sunday School. But we often miss the verse which shows God's love for the world, not just humanity. If we read on we will see that God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world would be saved through him. That same Jesus came to offer salvation for all creation.

Paul picks up the theme in his letter to the Colossians. He points out that Jesus is central to creation for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created. He offers thanks to God for his sacrifice on the cross and that he came to reconcile all things to himself (Colossians 1:15-20). As we look around at the impact of the changes in our climate and the severity of each occurrence, we share concerns for people all over the world. The people in British Columbia on the West Coast of Canada experienced the highest temperature recorded, ever. People lost their lives and all over the world we see that scenario being repeated.

There we are now nearing the end of the story, but the story we have been exploring is not yet over. We are still living it. In Revelation we see that God's redemption story ends with a new Heaven and a new (or renewed) Earth. John in his writing mentions that the leaves from the trees are for the healing of the nation. This will not come to pass if we keep cutting down the trees. John also talks about the river of life. How can the river give life if it is polluted with plastics or is flooded because of changes to the climate?

John's book of Revelation offers us a new heaven and a new earth. The song writer says "I am a new creation", I am sure that the new has got to be an improvement on the old. So it is with our lives. When we commit our lives to Christ we become new wine, and like our world around us we are renewed by the Holy Spirit.

In conclusion, as we emerge from lock down let us consider and reflect on the difference we have seen over the past months. The birds seem to be singing more and there seems to be many more of them, everything is in full bloom, creation has had a moment to recover, but we can still make that one step to commit to growing into a green(er) church.

Song for Reflection - MP 152

For the beauty of the earth, for the beauty of the skies,
For the love which from our birth, over and around us lies,
Lord of all to thee we raise,
This our joyful hymn of praise

For the beauty of the hour of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale and tree and flower, sun and moon and stars of light
Lord of all to thee we raise,
This our joyful hymn of praise

For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child,
Friends on earth and friends above, for a gentle, thoughts and mild for a gentle
Thoughts and mild Lord of all to thee we raise
This our joyful hymn of praise.

Prayers of Intercession (adapted from URC Climate Sunday)

Let us come to God and pray for guidance on how you can best serve and preserve creation.

(Silence)

Pray for wisdom to ensure that you are not causing the land to be over-exploited through our actions and lifestyle. Pray for the climate change meetings in 2021, that they will create real change to tackle climate change

Pray for communities which are affected by climate change as they are faced with the challenges of climate injustice. Pray that God will show us how to reduce our own negative impacts on the environment and respect God's creation.

God challenges us. God encourages us. God confronts us, and God accept us. God work wonders in our midst and gives us eyes, hearts, souls, to cherish life. We pray for our great family, the Church, your gift of hope for the Earth. We ask for a perspective beyond division; for freedom from the aspiration. We pray that each one of our churches will give a commitment to continue to care for our world as we are all connected.

Thank God for his plan to make everything new (v5). Pray that as Christians we will help bring about this renewal through our words and actions.

We think of those in our community and we lift up... *names of those laid on our hearts* (Silence)

We pray and open to you the daily struggles of this community you have called to your praise and service; the conflicts, as we experience them, those insights which do fit wonderfully in to place the questions which shake and reinforce our faith. Our frailty, and vulnerability, which are key to our strength in you Amen

We bring all our prayers in the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples...

Our Father

Closing Hymn – MP 7

All creatures of our God and King, Lift up your voice and with us sing,
Alleluia! Alleluia!

Thou burning sun with golden beam, Thou silver moon with softer gleam!
O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Thou rushing wind that art so strong, Ye clouds that sail in Heaven along,
O praise Him! Alleluia!

Thou rising moon, in praise rejoice, Ye lights of evening, find a voice!
Thou flowing water, pure and clear, Make music for thy Lord to hear,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Blessing

God the Creator, who makes us with the Earth,
God the Son who saves us along with the Earth, and...
God the Holy Spirit who gives us wisdom in our struggles and gives us peace.

May the Trinity of Creation be with us all - **Amen**