

Creation, Contentment and Care 5 Sept 2021

Invitation to worship

We gather today around our Creator God, we are his handiwork, made for his glory. We gather to acknowledge his beautiful, awe-inspiring creation. May we hear God's invitation today: to care for the things he cares about, to delight in the wonders of his world, to join our Maker and sustainer in renewing creation, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Loving God, we do praise you for this wonderful and strange and sometimes harsh world that we live in. We know that we are to be stewards of it, to use its resources wisely and for good and to respect its wildness and strength.

Lord, when we have taken your creation for granted; When we have over-used and exploited its resources and polluted its air, water and land; Forgive us, gracious Father. When we have not fulfilled our calling to care for your earth; Forgive us, gracious Father.

May we work with you in the renewal of creation; May we speak and act for the good of your planet. Inspire and empower us we pray. May we value and share the good gifts you provide. We pray in the name of Jesus our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Bible Readings Psalm 19.1-6

Matthew 6.19-34

Sermon

God has provided us with a living planet which gives us food, water, shelter and so many other resources. And this world not only provides for us, it also teaches us about who God is, if we will listen. Paul says in Romans 1:

Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made. (Rom. 1:20)

If you have watched Blue Planet programs by David Attenborough you will have seen the power of tidal waves, huge whales in the sea and tiny insects on plants, the extraordinary variety of animals, sometimes beautiful and sometimes ugly, some at the top of the food chain: bears, wolves and lions and some like plankton, insects and mice are at the bottom, some are handsome as a thoroughbred horse and others are funny looking: elephants, zebras, puffins. Each seems to fit its own unique environment and eco-system – white hare in snow-capped mountains, the harshness of living in the wild. And if you have seen his recent shows, you will have seen how the rainforests are being cut down to make palm oil, this ice caps of the North and south pole are shrinking, glaciers are retreating, low-lying land in many places are facing greater floods and other areas are so hot that they cannot grow crops, in sub-Saharan Africa and others are suffering forest fires, just some of the challenges of nature in our modern world.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus invites us to take a closer look at creation. This might be a challenge for those of us who live much of our lives indoors or in towns and cities, we are particularly privileged here in St Ives that we have so many green spaces. Some people are just too busy and preoccupied with their lives and work to stop and contemplate God's world. Jesus says:

Look at the birds of the air... See how the flowers of the field grow. (Matt. 6:26, 28).

Open your eyes - says Jesus - to the way God's world is speaking to you. What can we learn by paying attention to this world that God has made - the animals, plants and natural processes all around us?

1) God cares for his creation

Jesus says that if we look at creation, we will see how God is constantly providing and caring for it. He is feeding the birds of the air. He is clothing the flowers of the field. God has set in motion how plant and animal life replenish and multiply. God has made this earth so that it has all the requirements for life – sunlight, water and oxygen and land. God cares about everything he has made, and he is at work allowing life to flourish and develop. Of course, we can explain many of these things in scientific terms and see evolutionary or biological reasons behind some of these processes. But as Christians we believe God is ultimately behind all the complexity of his creation, providing for and sustaining our planet, our galaxy, our universe, and each tiny detail within it.

Jesus goes on to say:

Are you not much more valuable than birds? If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you? (Matt. 6:26, 30).

Humanity has a special place in God's heart. We alone are his image bearers, uniquely created to be in relationship with God. Even though we have this privileged position, God still cares about every other aspect of his creation. It is possible that we as Christians have so emphasized and focused on the uniqueness of humans before God, we have underestimated the rest of God's world – its animal, plant and environment in ways which have not honoured God.

2) Creation groaning

The Bible is clear that human sinfulness affects not just our hearts and our relationships, but the very earth we live on. Paul writes in Romans 8:

For the creation was subjected to frustration... 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. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. (Rom. 8:20-22)

We don't have to look very far to see evidence of this frustration and groaning - plastic in our oceans, species driven to extinction, pollution in our air, destruction of habitats, poisoned waterways... and the list goes on.

Selfish priorities lead to destructive living. Jesus criticises us when we worry more about our own needs, instead of pursuing God's priorities. As he says in our reading:

So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. (Matt. 6:31-32)

God knows what we need - he cares for us and promises to provide. He wants us to take our eyes off our self-centred priorities. We are called to be content with what we have, rather than always wanting more at any cost to the world we live in.

We can repair and reuse some of the utensils we have; we can recycle more of the products we use – such as metals and materials in computers and smart phones; we can return to more natural products rather than plastic; we can make do with what we have rather than keep buying more and the latest product. We will learn some things we can do at the Eco fair on 18th Sept. And we can continue to lobby our government to develop renewable energy sources.

3) God is renewing his creation

Jesus invites us to turn from self-focussed living and instead to focus on God's priorities - to seek first God's Kingdom, his rule and reign. Sometimes in church we might think that God's Kingdom is just about churchy, spiritual-sounding things. But when the Bible talks about the coming Kingdom of God, it uses broad, expansive language which includes every aspect of God's creation.

This can be seen in Joel 2. The prophet is looking forward to the age of the Messiah, when the results of Israel's disobedience will be put right. That "putting right" is not merely about restoring humans: it includes the land and all that is in it. Joel speaks to the animals and the soil, the trees and the plants:

Do not be afraid, you wild animals,
for the pastures in the wilderness are becoming green.
The trees are bearing their fruit;
the fig-tree and the vine yield their riches. (Joel 2:22)

The whole passage is a promise of an abundant harvest, of nature fulfilling its original potential every aspect of God's world restored. This sense is echoed again at the end of the New Testament:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. (Rev. 22:1-3)

Here we see a city, full of abundant life, with fresh clean water, bearing fruit and providing healing for all of God's creation. These are pictures of what Jesus has in mind when he says, "seek first God's Kingdom". God's priorities are for his whole creation to be restored, for the selfishness of sin to be removed, for every part to be valued and cared for.

Right now, we have choices about how we live in relation to God's creation. Will we treat it solely with concern for our own wants, needs and convenience? Or will we partner with God in caring for and renewing his creation? God is not asking us to do it all by ourselves, but he is inviting us to each play our part. AMEN.

Prayers of Intercession

God, you have blessed us abundantly. We thank you for the provision of food, our daily bread. We bring to you the people across the world, and here in our community, who are hungry. May we, and all your people, share so that the gifts you give are distributed with justice and fairness. You give us each day our daily bread: make us thankful for your gifts, make us generous to share. We thank you for everyone who works in farming, food production, shops and restaurants. Bring prosperity and security to their businesses. Help us to work in partnership with your creation, in ways which benefit all you have made. You give us each day our daily bread: make us thankful for your gifts, make us generous to share. Jesus, you are the bread of life. We share the bread around your table, and you sustain us every day as we feed on you. Help us to share both our physical resources and the truth of who you are with the world around us. You give us each day our daily bread: make us thankful for your gifts, make us generous to share. Amen.

Blessing and Dismissal

As you leave this place, may you tread lightly through God's creation: eyes open to see its beauty; nose alert to fragrant fruit and flowers; tongue grateful for each delicious flavour; ears listening for birdsong, the rustle of leaves and the patter of raindrops; hands open to care for the earth; hands refraining from grasping. God sends you out, to tread lightly through his creation. Go in peace, in Jesus' name. Amen.