

Daily Devotions
from the United Reformed Church

Creation



Sunday 13th September – Saturday 19th September

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Introduction

In response to a call from the Ecumenical Patriarch many communions observe a month of Creationtime between September and October. The Covid 19 pandemic showed us the dangers of abusing animals, of how the planet can start to recover when human activity is scaled down and, despite the postponement of the Conference of the Parties in Glasgow we are still facing a climate emergency. For the week ahead we will be thinking of the earth, our fragile home, as part of the majesty of God’s creation and challenge ourselves to embrace, protect and conserve it and the life which teems here.

Sunday 13th September Psalm 14

Michael RJ Topple, Lay Preacher and member of Chappel URC, Essex

Oh that your salvation and your rescue
would swiftly come to renew your people.

The fools have said in their heart:
“There is no God”: they are corrupt,
their deeds are all loathsome;
not one of them does good.

viewing?

We live as though we can see nature (creation) from somewhere else. Consciously or unconsciously, we believe we're outside (or above) it all. In truth, though, we're players, not spectators, in the game of life; actors, not the audience, in this planetary part of the "theatre of God's glory". Paul was a practical theologian, not an ecologist. Writing of humankind sharing the groanings of creation, and creation awaiting the freedom of the glory of the children of God, he's not describing scientifically how we humans can only flourish as part of healthy planetary ecosystems, though that's true as well. Paul's point is that God's intention for human freedom is caught up with God's intentions for the flourishing of all of God's creation, and vice versa. We are not outside or above it all, although we may be an important part of it.

First century Christians were not confronted by catastrophic changes to the planet brought about by humanly induced climate change. Had they been, Paul might have had more to say. He might have said that we who subject the rest of creation to ecological bondage and decay are living as though we think we can frustrate God's desire for its flourishing. And being Paul, he would have said that forcefully.

Ecologically and theologically we are all in this together. Better then, to live our lives in ways that anticipate the 'freedom of the glory of the children in God', both for ourselves and for everything else as well.

Prayer

God of all creation,
give me a lively sense of your intentions;
give me desire and the means to journey in those ways;
that the whole world (including me),
obtains your glorious freedom. Amen.

The Lord looks down from the heavens
seeking for those who understand, any seeking out God;
all have turned aside in conjoint corruption
and fallen short of God's glory,
and among them not one of them does good.

Will evil doers not learn?

Greedy, devouring God's chosen people like they chew bread.
They shall quake with dread
for the Lord is present in power among all his people.
Yes, the Lord will be our protecting strength.

You can hear v1 sung here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3nNeXyNpRc>

Reflection

I am writing this Devotion while stuck at home owing to the Coronavirus, and I daresay that many of us will have cried something similar to the first line of today's Psalm. 'Oh, that Your salvation and Your rescue would swiftly come and renew Your people'. Many of us, I am sure, will call out to God in times of need, and while some will get the answer they seek, some may hear nothing back.

A little while ago, when all of the lockdown measures first came into place, I was involved with a service conducted over Facebook Live, in connexion with a local Methodist church (see the play on words?). The service itself was lovely, and the regular congregation enjoyed it. The church had paid to boost the post to the local area, and amid all of the positive responses, one gentleman was obviously annoyed with what he saw. This man was determined that 'there is no God'. He made his views clear, he posted comment after comment, and the minister and others politely engaged with him, even offering to meet for a chat after lockdown came to an end. After a while, it was clear that we were

getting nowhere, and the gentleman's comments were becoming more and more angry, so the minister stopped responding.

Now, I should make it clear that I am not equating the upset commenter with people who are 'corrupt', nor am I saying that negative comments are 'loathsome deeds'. I would be the first to argue that people are entitled to their opinions and that free speech is the cornerstone of a civilised society. But at times, we all have to admit when we can do no more. We must, to quote Jesus, shake the dust from our feet and move on. Eventually, we hope, the Holy Spirit will move in that person/group's lives, and in the meantime, we can pray.

This may feel like giving in, it may feel like giving up. It may leave us feeling beaten and weak. But we must remember that God is 'present in power among His people. Yes, the Lord will be our protecting strength'.

Prayer

Loving God,
Go with us as we labour for Your Kingdom,
go with us as we share Your Word.
Grant us the strength to proclaim Your Gospel anew,
grant us the insight to know when to move on,
and help us to remember that You are always alongside us,
as our protecting strength. Amen

[Monday 14th September Creation 1](#)

The Rev'd Gwen Collins, retired minister, member of Avenue St Andrews URC, Southampton

St John 1: 1 - 5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him, not one thing came into being. What

Expressing all this more theologically – repentance leads to fulness of life. Maybe these words may seem utterly futile or wildly gloomy depending on what has happened in the interval between my writing this and your reading it. Only one thing is certain. Our God cares for his creation.

Prayer

Lord, I believe. Help Thou mine unbelief.

[Saturday 19th September Creation 6](#)

The Rev'd Trevor Jamison is minister of St Columba's URC in North Shields

Romans 8: 18 - 25

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Reflection

Lots of us love watching nature programmes on television. We revel in the flora and fauna of Planet Earth; we marvel at the penguins, the whales, and other marine life in Blue Planet; and all accompanied by the reassuring voice of (Saint?) David Attenborough. But where are the pictures of human creatures like you and me in all of those hours of

for they have transgressed laws,
violated the statutes,
broken the everlasting covenant.
Therefore a curse devours the earth,
and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt;
therefore the inhabitants of the earth dwindled,
and few people are left.

Reflection

This passage is in stark contrast to that of yesterday, where one could at least glean some hope from the reality of God's holding the life of every living thing in his hand. It seems that humanity has moved so far from respecting the covenant that the apocalypse has well and truly come to devastating effect. As a later verse puts it, the gladness of the earth is banished.

Some will discern a picture of what might happen if we do not take urgent action to mitigate the effects of climate change, or globalisation, or the attitude of "because you're worth it". Covid-19 has focussed our attention on how rapidly events move in a connected world, upsetting complacency and engendering distress. Even deeply entrenched norms can be swiftly superseded, some for the good, others less so.

But therein lies hope. People can change when they are convinced that change is for the better, not necessarily just for themselves, but for the good of others – those at a distance as well as those close to them. People have put much of their own ordered and comfortable lives on hold to reach out to help those in greater need. People are indeed reflecting on what is truly important and what is merely convenient or enjoyable. We are told that an increasing number are discovering something of value in connecting to the various forms of on-line worship which have sprung up, presented by faith groups across the spectrum. Perhaps that too may have a lasting effect.

has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Reflection

Now is the season to make a step change.
Now is the moment to invent a new humanity.
Now is the hour to grasp the hand of God and move forward courageously on a different path.

Quantum mechanics has opened up our understanding of the material world being shaped through probabilities. Theologically this is tremendously exciting and empowering. The future does not yet exist. Let me repeat that. The future does not yet exist. God's call to Life, in Christ, is a call to discern together what actions now would be life-giving for the future. Then to commit 100% to that Way.

Limiting the rise in global temperature and securing a level of biodiversity which can sustain the earth's ecological systems are key amongst those life-giving actions.

In the beginning - the Word was with God.

In Jesus - the Word was with those who lived in Palestine 2000 years ago.
In the Spirit - the Word was, is and will be, with humanity.

In the 21st century - the Word is with us as dependably, as surely, as truly, as creatively and as radically as it ever was. And as demandingly!

In our Kairos moment let us not be found wanting.

Prayer

God who is the Word,

praise, glory and wonder be yours for bringing life into being.
You are our light.
Shine in the gloom and murk of our earth-damaging practices.
Illuminate our possible futures.
Raise us up to choose the life-giving path.
So may we honour your great gift to humanity in Jesus, the Life Giver.
Amen

[Tuesday 15th September Creation 2](#)

John Collings, Lay Preacher, Rutherglen URC

Isaiah 42: 1 - 7

Thus says God, the Lord,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:
I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.

Reflection

This is the first of four passages in Isaiah which are known as The Servant Songs. We exist only because God created us. We breath because we have been given air by God. As we have read of tens of thousands dying unable to breath because of Covid-19 we must appreciate our breath even more. More than just air to breath we are told by Isaiah that we have the Spirit as well.

indeed listen to the teaching of the animals, birds, plants and fish. With the enforced reduction in human activity, is not the birdsong louder? Have fish not returned to the canals of Venice and other places? Is the air not cleaner? Are we not able to enjoy more exercise, more time for reading, for music?

All true. But others point out that humans are social animals and without societal interaction, without human touch, without intimacy, mental ill-health increases. In any case such improvements might be merely ephemeral.

Our God is a relational God interacting with our lives in a two-way social and covenantal process. If we pull the balance towards ourselves, the relationship suffers and we suffer. Job perceived the balance to be wrong, so he suffered. For us, the balance between humanity and nature has swung. Resilience is reduced and we suffer.

Prayer

Covenantal God, help us to repair the balance, to listen to what nature and the world is telling us. Lead us to work for a better world which reflects more nearly our relationship with you.

[Friday 18th September Creation 5](#)

The Rev'd Ron Reid is a retired minister in the Mersey Synod serving as Link Minister at Rock Chapel, Farndon. He is a member at Upton-by-Chester URC

Isaiah 24: 4-6

The earth dries up and withers,
the world languishes and withers;
the heavens languish together with the earth.
The earth lies polluted
under its inhabitants;

Thursday 17th September Creation

The Rev'd Ron Reid is a retired minister in the Mersey Synod serving as Link Minister at Rock Chapel, Farndon. He is a member at Upton-by-Chester URC

Job 12: 7 - 10

'But ask the animals, and they will teach you;
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.

Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?
In his hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.

Reflection

Such are the vagaries of composing Devotions that as I write this, England seems to be on the cusp of either slithering tentatively towards something which might possibly resemble life as it was before the pandemic or, alternatively, sliding back to more lonely and mind-bending social isolation. Hopefully when you read this, the sun will be shining again.

Things were not clarifying for Job nearing the end of the first cycle of debate with his three friends. Why had God visited such trials upon him, a righteous man? Why was he a laughing stock while those who provoked God were secure? Seeking an answer, he turns to the world of nature which seems to suggest that the animals, birds, plants and fish know the answer: "'twas ever thus". In God's Creation, it's just the way of things.

The debaters chew this over for the next thirty chapters. In the problems facing us in the year of our Lord 2020, some suggest that we should

Matthew quotes the first few verses and makes it clear that the servant is Jesus. It is Jesus who came as a light to the nations. Writing this during the lockdown when many people feel like prisoners in their own homes it is interesting that many churches have noticed a marked increase in the number attending online during this time. Are these people looking to be rescued from the dungeon of despair that they are in? How should we react as Christians as things return to some sort of normality? We should make sure that Jesus is seen as the light who can brighten the darkness of those who ask for help.

This light is not just for those who are new to the Church, but it is also for those who have been members for many years. We all need the same spirit to open our eyes and free us from whatever prison we feel we are in.

Times will still be different when you read this and the new normal may not be fully clear but what is clear is that the spirit Isaiah wrote about is timeless and unchanging. No matter what the situation is we should continue to live inhaling God's grace and exhaling God's love.

Prayer

Loving God

I thank you for all that you are
I thank you for the air I breath
for the ground beneath my feet
Thank you for your Spirit who is with me today
Thank you for opening my eyes
Thank you for setting me free
Help me to enjoy the life you have given me
Help me to tell others how great You are
Let me praise and thank you in the name of Jesus
Amen

Wednesday 16th September Creation 3

The Rev'd Gethin Rhys is Policy Officer for Cytun (Churches together in Wales) and a member of Parkminster URC, Cardiff.

Psalm 96: 10 - 13

Say among the nations, 'The Lord is king!

The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.

He will judge the peoples with equity.'

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;

let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

let the field exult, and everything in it.

Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy

before the Lord; for he is coming,

for he is coming to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness,

and the peoples with his truth.

Reflection

I was brought up in a liberal Christianity which shied away from judgement and what appeared to us to be a vindictive God. The climate crisis has made me reassess this tradition. This Psalm should make us all reassess it.

The Psalmist weaves together the joyful song of the created order with God's judgement on the peoples. They are not two different aspects of God's nature, they are one and the same. This may seem odd to those of us who have lived comfortably through this recent, very short, period of human history, in which our minority of the world's human population has lived a luxurious life with only the occasional reminder of our creatureliness. The vast majority of the human population through history, the majority of the world in 2021, and perhaps all of us in the light of COVID-19, we can no longer forget that we also are mere

creatures of our Creator.

To cope with that change we need to hear this Psalm and the judgement on humanity in it. David Attenborough's series 'A Life on our Planet' on Netflix concludes that the havoc wreaked by us comfortable people, in our excessive consumption of the earth's resources, does not imperil the planet itself. But it certainly imperils humanity.

The Psalmist is right – the forests shall go on singing with joy, the seas will roar, the fields exult and the planet will spin for millions more years. But humanity is bringing God's judgement on itself by disregarding our place in creation and trying to be like God (rather like Adam and Eve in Genesis 3).

We need to hear this truth – our desire to be gods is a vain pretence. If we don't realise that very soon indeed, then we will surely reap the whirlwind of God's judgement.

Prayer

Loving Creator God,

we are sorry that we have tried to keep for ourselves

the song of the trees, the roaring of the sea,

the exaltation of the fields and the rejoicing of the earth

without seeking also your judgement in equity on the peoples.

Turn our hearts,

that like the Psalmist we may rejoice in your righteous judgement

and turn from our evil ways

so that creation's song may continue as you intended. Amen.