

Christ Church and the Bridgwater Drive Church, 6 September 2020

Welcome to the joint worship for Christ Church and The Bridgwater Drive Church. Today is Climate Sunday, so members of the Christ Church Faith in Action Group will be participating in the service. Churches Together in Britain are also encouraging us to observe Creation Time a period of reflection on climate issues from 1 September to 4 October.

Call to worship – read by Wendy

The Creator of the Universe calls us to leave the darkness behind and live in the light.
Our Lord Jesus Christ who lived and died and rose again greets us this day.
The One who danced at Creation's birth calls us now into God's presence.
So come let us worship.

Hymn O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder (R&S 117 omit v3) sung by Thora

O lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
consider all the works thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
thy power throughout the universe displayed:
*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to thee,
How great though art, how great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to thee,
How great though art, how great thou art!*

When through the woods and forest glades I wander,
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
and hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze.

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
and take me home – what joy shall fill my heart!
Then shall I bow in humble adoration,
and there proclaim: My God, how great thou art!

Opening prayer

O God, you adorn the poor binding rulers in chains and allowing the people to rejoice;
rise up O God anew, adorn your creation,
bind all that seeks to destroy it, that we may not perish but live.
O God, often it seems we have to eat bitter herbs as the Angel of Death has not passed over us;
we grieve those who have died from Covid 19,
lives lost from all over our land, old and young, fit and frail,
care-worker and bus driver, nurse and doctor.
As we grieve we have to accept:
our complicity, our failure to plan, our failure to learn the lessons, our failure to care for our world,
and our failure to treat nature and animal life with respect.
Forgive us, good Lord, and help us to turn our sorrow into action,
our failure into change, our guilt into grace.

God, the source of all mercy,
has sent the Holy Spirit amongst us for the forgiveness of sins,
the equipping of the saints and the fine tuning of our hearts.
Know that you are forgiven, know too that you, with all of humanity,
need to use the grace of forgiveness to be an energy of change. Amen.

Offertory. Please remember that both our churches are struggling with very limited income and so please consider making a donation by monthly standing order if you can or send a donation by cheque. You may also like to consider supporting an environmental charity this week or taking action by signing a petition or writing to your MP about a relevant issue.

In deep gratitude for all that You have created, we offer ourselves and our gifts to You as living sacrifices of worship and light. Show us what is good and pleasing in Your sight, so that we may be quick to recognize Your call, and quick to respond. In the name of Jesus, our Lord, **Amen**.

Hymn God weeps (Church Hymnary) sung by Naomi, piano by Ian de Massini

God weeps
at love withheld,
at strength misused,
at children's innocence abused,
and, till we change the way we love,
God weeps.

God cries
at hungry mouths,
at running sores,
at creatures dying without cause,
and, till we change the way we care,
God cries.

God bleeds
at anger's fist,
at trust betrayed,
at women battered and afraid,
and till we change the way we win
God bleeds.

God waits
For stones to melt
For peace to seed,
For hearts to hold each other's need,
And till we understand the Christ,
God waits.

Bible reading: Romans 13:8-14 read by Robert

The Old Testament reading for today, which we have not read, but have alluded to in our opening prayer, is the story of the first Passover. The Israelites are told that this month shall mark the beginning of all the months; it shall be the first month of the year – a new start, a new beginning, yet it starts by remembering how God saved their first born from death, how they were 'passed over'. There follows very specific details on how they should celebrate the Passover. They should roast a whole lamb and eat all of it, not waste any. If the family is too small to consume a whole lamb on their own, they should join with their neighbours. The meal should also be eaten with 'your loins girded and sandals on your feet' in other words ready for action.

Setting aside the problems this may present for vegetarians, or those who seek to help the environment by eating very little meat, this passage does offer us two helpful things to think about on this Climate Sunday and Creation Time: when we eat, we should share and make sure nothing goes to waste. We have the benefit of fridges and freezers and methods of preserving – this has been brought to mind recently with the glut of plums that has resulted in sticky plums with sausages, plum jam, plum cake and plums in rum! Waste not want not were the watch words of my childhood and they should still hold true today; not because we are poor, but because the world's resources are too precious to waste.

Henceforth, Passover was to signify the beginning of the year for the Israelites. The new year signifies the start of a new way of life, when God has redeemed the people from Egypt. The people share the feast of the Passover together, and they are to do so with sandals on, loins girded, and a staff in hand: ready to move. This first Passover was not an end in itself but the beginning of a new way of living and being. So, we too can resolve to start afresh - begin to treat creation differently. Sharing resources, acting inclusively and responsibly - not forgetting our ongoing need for

memorials and community rituals to mark our salvation and liberation and our ongoing need to recommit to caring for creation, Sunday by Sunday, season by season.

The first verse of our reading from Romans says, 'owe no one anything.' This was another favourite theme in my parent's house growing up. We were told to never have debts, not to buy anything on the 'never never' – sound advice. It may be that Paul is thinking of the words in the Lord's Prayer about forgiving debts. Or it may coincide with the theme often repeated in the New Testament of giving up possessions, giving to the poor, and applying faith to matters of finance. Any money-based economy is built on debt; and we see how our country is going further and further into debt as a result of the pandemic. Less developed countries have been in crippling debt for centuries and this drives much of the destruction of the environment – the need to improve the economy by extracting every last mineral and cash crop possible with no regard for the consequences. Perhaps Paul is arguing for a changed basis for our life together, where love is the top priority, not GDP, material possessions and inequality.

Paul goes on to reiterate the words of Jesus that love is the new commandment, the fulfilment of all the law. We are very familiar with the concept of love your neighbour, and that it means everyone, not just your literal neighbour or friends; but I think we tend to forget that in our globalised world, with international travel and the internet bringing us news from all over the world, that the poor in other countries are our neighbours. Is it not then demanded of us that we protect the environment to help our poorer neighbours? We know that destruction of the environment causes climate change which in turn brings freak weather, storms and flooding and rising sea levels that affect the poorest people and countries the most. Love is the answer, at its widest interpretation. We can all make a change. They might be very small changes, but added together they make a difference. We can all commit to using less plastic. We can commit to eating less and wasting less. We can commit to eating less meat and dairy. And if we cannot do it for environmental reasons, do it for love of others, for it is others who will suffer the brunt of climate change – much as wearing a face mask protects others much more than it protects you. Paul says, 'let us lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.' Let that armour of light be care for God's creation and love of others. Amen.

Hymn Lord, bring the day to pass (Church Hymnary)

Lord, bring the day to pass
when forest, rock, and hill,
the beasts, the birds, the grass,
will know your finished will:
when we attain our destiny
and nature lives in harmony.

Help us, when we release
creation's secret powers,
to harness them for peace,
our children's peace and ours:
teach us the art of mastering
in servant form, like Christ our King.

Forgive our careless use
of water, ore, and soil –
the plenty we abuse
supplied by others' toil:
save us from making self our creed,
turn us towards other's need.

Creation groans, travails,
futile its present plight,
bound – till the hour hails
God's children born of light:
that we may gain our true estate,
come, Lord, new heavens and earth create.

Commitment to environmental action – written by Elizabeth

As members of the United Reformed Church, we believe that the world that we live in is given by God. It is our responsibility as God's children to be good stewards of the bountiful resources that God has provided. The United Reformed Church (URC) has set, as one of its Five Marks of Mission to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

On this climate Sunday, we make a commitment that we will continue to act in the best ways to reduce our carbon footprint, both as a church and individuals, and help bring awareness to others using the church, and the community, to do likewise. To be mindful of the way we use electricity, paper and water – that we create as little waste as possible and recycle whatever we can.

We renew our commitment in demonstrating and encouraging an environmental and climate friendly way of life to the community we serve and other local churches.

We will commit to thinking of how to support climate and environmental organisations by signing petitions and writing to MPs.

We commit to ease flood waters, carbon dioxide and pollutant levels, and climate warming by maintaining our church garden. To also plant it in a way to attract insects and birds as well as being pleasing to the human eye and mind.

In our church worship we commit to singing hymns that celebrate creation, and that express God's call to us to care for creation and environmental concerns.

In the church's prayer life, we commit to praise God the creator and to confess and say sorry for the harm done to creation and to give thanks for the gift of creation and pray for its healing.

We commit to work with fair trade, Christian Aid, and Christ Church's partner church in Budiriro, so promoting environmental care globally.

We commit to continuing to bring awareness of environment and climate to youth and children's groups and house groups.

We commit to investing and maintaining our church buildings in an environmentally friendly and ethical way.

Source, Guide and Goal of all that is: to God be eternal Glory. Amen.

Hymn God in his love (R&S 85) sung by Thora

God in his love for us lent us this planet,
gave it a purpose in time and in space:
small as a spark from the fire of creation,
cradle of life and the home of our race.

Thanks be to God for its bounty and beauty,
life that sustains us in body and mind:
plenty for all, if we learn how to share it,
riches undreamed of to fathom and find.

Long have our human wars ruined its harvest;
long has earth bowed to the terror of force;
long have we wasted what others have need of,
poisoned the fountain of life at its source.

Earth is the Lord's: it is ours to enjoy it,
ours, as his stewards, to farm and defend.
From its pollutions, misuse and destruction,
good Lord, deliver us, world without end!

Prayers of intercession - Geoff

Lord, today is climate Sunday.

We are in awe of the power of nature.

We have seen storms and heavy rain here.

Storm Laura has wreaked havoc in the Americas.

We have suffered in the heat here.

In California there have been fires, in Asia catastrophic floods.

However clever we think we are, nature will outsmart us.

Lord, we see our climate changing and this is due to our own activity, or lack of it.

We are wedded to our fossil fuels.

We dispose of our rubbish carelessly.

We think our resources are inexhaustible.

We saw some evidence of our effects when our activity was reduced during lockdown and some of the changes started to reverse.

These changes have consequences.

Our wheat yields are decreased, so some foods may cost more.

Oceans are rising, so floods are more frequent.

Help us Lord to change our behaviours to benefit our climate.

Help us to lobby those with influence.

Open the eyes of those who cannot see.

Lord we lift up to you those of our congregations who need you to be close to them. Be with our brothers and sisters in Zimbabwe.

Be with those throughout the world who have difficulties.

Give us the resources and resilience to cope with the current pandemic.

Help us to learn to live with nature for the benefit of us all. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn Touch the earth lightly (Church Hymnary) sung by Thora

Touch the earth lightly,
use the earth gently,
nourish the life of the world in our care:
gift of great wonder,
ours to surrender,
trust for the children tomorrow will bear.

Let there be greening,
birth from the burning,
water that blesses and air that is sweet,
health in God's garden,
hope in God's children,
regeneration that peace will complete.

We who endanger,
who create hunger,
agents of death for all creatures that live,
we who would foster
clouds of disaster,
God of our planet, forestall and forgive!

God of all living,
God of all loving,
God of the seedling, the snow, and the sun,
teach us, deflect us,
Christ re-connect us,
using us gently and making us one.

Blessing from the URC Prayer Handbook, a prayer based on Romans 13:8-14, which seems to me more like a sending out and blessing:

Friends, God is with us. And as we leave this place,
go, knowing these things

- that love do no one any wrong
- and love is our saving grace.

As we go through the week, owe nothing, except to love one another

- for love leads to salvation
- and salvation is nearer to us now than ever before.

Go through the week recognising that love has everything to do with justice and right living.
What's love got to do with it? Everything! So go in love. Amen