

Call: Ps 24 v1 “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.”

Hymn StF 102 *Follott Sandford Pierpoint (1835-1917)* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bDoMfIYErE>

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| 1 | For the beauty of the earth,
for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies:
<i>Gracious God, to you we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.</i> | | for the heart and mind's delight,
for the mystic harmony
linking sense to sound and sight: |
| 2 | For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale, and tree and flower,
sun and moon and stars of light: | 4 | For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth, and friends above,
pleasures pure and undefiled: |
| 3 | For the joy of ear and eye, | 5 | For each perfect gift and sign
of your love so freely given,
graces human and divine,
flowers of earth and buds of heaven: |

Reading: Psalm 148

Talk1. The Beauty of Creation

Psalm 148 is full of words of praise by all of Creation, from the heavens looking down, to the creatures at the deepest part of the deepest ocean. The sun and moon, the stars that fill the sky at night, mountains and hills, animals wild and domesticated, and only in the last 3 verses of the psalm are humans, young and old, male and female told to praise God the Creator.

Over the last 18 months, when we were unable to go far outside, and traffic ceased, and smog filled skies cleared, people suddenly became aware of things they had not seen before. Hearing birds in the trees, seeing wild animals close to home. We saw hares jumping in the fields, foxes running through the undergrowth. We had a magnificent buzzard and two barn owls swooping past the house in an evening. All these things were seen almost without stepping out of the front door.

Lucy Jones, wrote in an article for the Guardian newspaper in May 2020, entitled “noticing nature is the greatest gift you can get from lockdown,” - “Our lives are made from the things we pay attention to.”

Psalm 148 doesn’t talk about exotic things we have to trek miles and miles to see, it talks about things we have seen 100s of times before – such as the night sky, a honey bee with bulging pollen sacs on a brightly coloured flower, the barn owl swooping across a cornfield, or a cobweb glistening with morning dew. The psalmist makes us look, not to just see, rather to really look and pay attention to what is going on.

When we saw the buzzard in our back garden it was fascinating to watch him looking around, biding his time then flying on to the next observation spot, only to then be mobbed by a murder of crows, (what an interesting term!) What was it we were observing? Creation doing it’s own thing, in it’s own way, the way the Creator meant it to be. Creation continues whether we see it, hear it, notice it or not.

We are not needed for Creation, yes we have a role to play – more of that later. Creation continues without and often despite us – think of the flowers pushing through the cracks in a pavement, or the poppies in WW1 Flanders fields.

- *What part of Creation did you see over the last 18 months that you hadn’t noticed before?*
- *What do you see around you now to praise God for?*

Prayer of adoration

Creator God, there is so much for which we praise you. For the birdsong at dawn, for the vibrant colours of the hedgerow, for the crops in the field, for mountain tops and valleys, for rivers and oceans, for science and technology, for shops and schools. Help us to not only see but to pay attention to your wonderful world. Amen.

Reading: Romans 8:18-25

Talk 2: The Groans of Creation

At the side of our house we have a pond, well actually it's a ditch channelling the water draining of the surrounding fields. In winter it floods onto the lawn at both the front and the back of the house, and often flows directly onto the road. However at this time of year it is bone dry. Even when it is full there are no fish in it, we might get a few ducks and moorhens swimming on it. The water is murky and full of whatever has been sprayed on the fields. This of course is nothing remotely like the dried up river beds in many countries around the world. Did you know the Europe has two of the countries at highest risk of drought? Moldova and Ukraine. The Middle East, North Africa, and Asia – including India and China all have medium to high risk of drought.

Closer to home and at the opposite end of the weather spectrum we have seen devastating floods in Germany and to a lesser extent in our own country in Somerset, South Yorkshire, and more recently in London. Greece and Turkey are struggling with wildfires. Although I didn't experience it at close quarters, whilst visiting our son in Sydney Australia in February 2020 we flew from Sydney to Melbourne and from the height of plane we could see a huge area of grey brown smoke with a central red area, which I assume was fires burning in the Australian bush. We used to think a temperature in the high 30s was bad, but now temperatures as high as the 40s and even 54°C in Death Valley.

2000 years ago Paul told us that the whole of creation was groaning. He told us that creation was subjected to frustration and the bondage of decay. This is a message as relevant now as it was then. And who is this down to? Us. There was one stark if not obvious fact that came out of the IPCC report in August. It is human activity that has brought about the Climate Crisis.

One commentator on this passage from Romans wrote, "sin caused all creation to fall from the perfect state in which God created it." We can directly apply that to the Climate Crisis – we have caused creation to fall from the perfect state in which God created it." There is a breakdown in the covenant relationship between people and the earth.

Back in Genesis 8 God makes that covenant promise with Noah. "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, and never again will I destroy all living creatures." It is not God's punishment, it is our action or inaction that has brought us here. Now is the time that we need to plead for God's forgiveness, coupled with our repentance and commitment to change.

- *What ecological sin do we need to confess?*
- *How can we renew that covenant relationship with this precious earth?*

Hymn StF 727 Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000) © 1973 Stainer & Bell Ltd. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4AeZoZatu8>

1	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.	3	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.
2	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.	4	Earth is the Lord's: it is ours to enjoy it, Ours, as his stewards, to farm and defend. From its pollution, misuse, and destruction, Good Lord deliver us, world without end!

Prayer of confession

Merciful Father, we have been selfish in our use of resources. We are part of the problem. We come to you now, today, at this time, to plead for the planet. We are sorry for all that we have done wrong and for all that we have not done that has brought us to this point. Forgive us we pray and help us to make the changes that are needed. AMEN

Reading: Col 1:15-23 (The Message)

Talk 3: The Hope for Creation

Christiana Figueres, the UN Climate Chief at the Paris Agreement of 2015, said in response to the IPCC report, "everything we need to avoid exponential impacts of climate change is doable. But it depends on solutions moving exponentially faster than impacts." We may feel that the Climate Crisis is too big to handle, what difference can I make?

Think about the image of creation being a collection of individuals making up the whole to bring the most beautiful harmony together. If one player in an orchestra consistently plays the wrong note the harmony is ruined. Each musician is essential to the whole piece.

I've tried to plant more flowers in my garden that attract pollinators, the neighbouring farmer – he whose fields drain into our pond, has placed a beehive in his fields, and hopefully will as a consequence consider what chemicals he uses on his crops.

Our bible passage from Colossians gives us a unique perspective of personal, global and cosmic redemption and reconciliation. Christ, who is divine, came to earth in human form, to live amongst his creation. He was God's human representation and revealed God to us. He saw first hand creation at work, and he died on the cross for that creation, not just for me, not just for humanity, but for the whole of creation.

We might be quite used to thinking that Christ died for me – as amazing as that seems, but to think that Christ died for all of creation seems almost unbelievable. Who would do such a thing? The cross is much more than personal salvation. Jesus through his broken body on a broken tree takes all that is alienated, polluted and corrupted and reconciles and restores it.

In the Message it says that through Christ "all broken and dislocated pieces of the universe – people and things, animals and atoms get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies because of his death." These are such great words of hope- that this broken and dislocated world, and everything in it, has a chance- through Jesus Christ. Jesus who is not only the creator, but the sustainer, holding everything together, protecting and preventing it from disintegrating into chaos. It is through Christ that we can be brought back into the correct relationship with God and with the whole of creation.

The hollyhocks that were planted to encourage the pollinators in our garden have brought colour, enjoyment and real nourishment to those insects that visit. Those insects will in turn pollinate crops that will give us food. That food will help us grow and develop. Multiply that up from my tiny back yard, to the rest of this planet, and who knows?

And so our response to the Climate Crisis is at an individual level, a corporate and a global level. God's creation has no borders, no exclusions – God is not selfish, he does not keep things for himself whilst others suffer and go without. We can all play our part as our personal response to what Jesus did for us individually and also for what he did for all of creation on that cross.

- *How can we hold together the personal reconciliation that Jesus brings and the cosmic?*
- *What signs of hope can you bring as your response to all that Jesus has done?*

Song: Bless the Lord O My Soul

Jonas Myrin and Matt Redman © 2010 Said and Done Music
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSxocnlaNOA>

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul,
worship his holy name.
Sing like never before, O my soul.
I'll worship your holy name.*

The sun comes up, it's a new day dawning;
it's time to sing your song again.
Whatever may pass, and whatever lies before me,
let me be singing when the evening comes.
You're rich in love and you're slow to anger.
Your name is great, and your heart is kind.
For all your goodness, I will keep on singing;
ten thousand reasons for my heart to find.

And on that day when my strength is failing,
the end draws near, and my time has come;
still my soul will sing your praise unending:
Ten thousand years and then forevermore!

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul,
worship his holy name.
Sing like never before, O my soul.
I'll worship your holy name.
I'll worship your holy name.
Yes, I'll worship your holy name.*

Blessing:

The Lord bless his world and keep it, guard it and sustain it, nurture and restore it, make his face to shine upon it and give it peace. Amen.