

Circuit Service 18th September 2022

Prepared by Revd. David Shaw

Call to Worship 'The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands' Ps 19 v 1

Welcome to this act of worship in the season of Creation-tide. We have come to celebrate our God, who reveals himself through creation and ultimately in Jesus. What a privilege we share in worshipping the Creator and Saviour of the world. Let us sing in praise of our awesome God:

Hymn StF 99 All creatures of our God and king (verses 1 – 4)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VF12LkUS25c>

<p>1 All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing, alleluia, alleluia ! O burning sun with golden beam, and silver moon with softer gleam : <i>O praise him, O praise him, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia !</i></p> <p>2 O rushing wind that is so strong, and clouds that sail in heaven along, O praise him, alleluia ! O rising morn, in praise rejoice ; and lights of evening, find a voice :</p>	<p>3 O flowing water, pure and clear, make music for your Lord to hear, sing 'Praise him, alleluia !' O fire, so masterful and bright, giving to all both warmth and light :</p> <p>4 Dear mother earth, who day by day unfolds rich blessings on our way, O praise him, alleluia ! The flowers and fruits that bloom and grow, let them his glory also show :</p>
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[This is a super hymn, however, its 7 verses can feel daunting. I suggest the first 4 verses are sung now and the final 3 verses at the end.]

For the first time for many of us 'king' has taken on a new and day to day significance. For we have been used to 'queen' for 70 years and now following her majesty Queen Elizabeth's death we have a king, Charles III. To sing that hymn's opening line feels different. Nonetheless it is not Charles to whom the hymn points, but our Creator God, our awesome God, the King of Kings who in the words of a hymn by Rich Mullins, 'reigns from heaven above, with wisdom, power and might.'

Prayer

Loving God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, King of Creation we praise you for the universe you have made of which we are a part. Your creation speaks of your majesty and splendour. Your glory is declared in everything you have made. We are in awe of your desire to share who you are through and in the diversity and intricacy of your creation.

Loving God, we come too to seek your forgiveness for the way our lifestyles and the systems of the world abuse your creation and hurt the people you have made. Our actions and complicity make us culpable in the destruction and selfishness which are taking place. How can you forgive our self-centredness, our 'turning a blind eye', our ignoring of the cries of others. Help us Lord and King to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Come Holy Spirit convict us of our sin that we might repent.

Silence

The almighty and most merciful God grant you pardon,
forgiveness of all your sins,
time for true repentance and amendment of life,
and the grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Amen (Methodist Worship Book p 149)

Hymn StF 100 'All things Bright and beautiful' – you are invited to take note especially of the final verse
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VggKfGRTOPM>

<p><i>All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small, all things wise and wonderful, the Lord God made them all.</i></p> <p>1 Each little flower that opens, each little bird that sings, he made their glowing colours, he made their tiny wings :</p> <p>2 The purple heathered mountain, the river running by, the sunset, and the morning that brightens up the sky :</p>	<p>3 The cold wind in the winter, the pleasant summer sun, the ripe fruits in the garden, he made them every one :</p> <p>4 He gave us eyes to see them, and lips that we might tell how great is God Almighty, who has made all things well :</p> <p>Cecil Frances Alexander (1818–1895) <i>(alt.)</i></p>
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Introduction to the readings

I remember being shocked reading something by American theologian, Richard Rohr, when he described creation as God’s first Bible. Even for me, someone passionate about the environment and biodiversity Rohr seemed to be pushing it too far. Really the first Bible!! Although I wasn’t persuaded the thought stayed with me.

During my sabbatical I tried unsuccessfully to read a psalm every day followed a time of reflection and a dip into what the commentator, Walter Bruggemann, had to say about the Psalm. Then I’d read a chunk of Romans. It was wonderful to have to time to spend doing this. The following readings are among the passages I read. I invite you to listen with the Richard Rohr thought in your head:

Readings

Psalm 19 v 1 – 6

Romans 1 v 18 – 23

Sermon

Please note that both these readings are part of a longer and wider whole. You might wish to check out the rest on your own.

Reading those passages, it strikes me Richard Rohr is right. Creation is God’s first Bible. Am I just wanting it to be so and imposing my desires onto these Bible extracts? Hear what this prominent Biblical scholar has to say about verses 19 & 20:

- Creation is ‘part of God’s own deliberate self-disclosure’.
In other words, God intentionally chose to make himself knowable through creation.
- ‘God’s self-revelation [has been] continuous ever since creation’.
Paul in this argument is saying no-one can use the excuse I didn’t know. Clearly the Jews should know what God has chosen to reveal of himself and those who met with Jesus the same. But Paul is telling us everyone who has ever lived should have known through creation. This knowability of God has been available since the beginning of time. There is no excuse.
- We ‘have been constantly surrounded on all sides, and have possessed within ourselves, the evidences of God’s eternal power and divinity’.
It isn’t that God has just put himself out there, but everyone has the capacity to recognise, experience the reality of God’s eternal power and divinity.

Psalm 19 is clear – Creation is a preacher. Creation preaches day and night. Creation proclaims and presents the glory of God. The preacher who is creation is intelligible in any language, in any culture. The very world we live in declares the glory of God.

Do you remember the scene in 'Mary Poppins' where Mary and the Banks' children Jane and Michael meet Bert who has just painted some pictures on the pavement. They jump into the picture taking them to the countryside and a carousel horse race. Imagine you written Bible on the table and you jump into it. You land in story of Nehemiah and the rebuilding of Jerusalem or the story of Ruth. We'd be living, seeing and experiencing God's written revelation. How awesome would that be!!

I wonder if the awesomeness might wear off after a while. I wonder if we'd stop noticing the things was revealing of himself.

I wonder if that what we're a bit like with the first Bible. We've lost our sense of awe. We've stopped noticing the things God is revealing to us of himself in the world around us.

Jesus has the antidote in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus encourages us to 'consider'. Don't just look, consider – take time, look carefully and think. In Matthew 6 v 26 & 28 he says:
v26 'Consider the birds of the air' and what might discover of God and God's care through observing them.
v28 'Consider the lilies of the field' and what we might discover of God and God's provision through observing them.

So, my sisters and brothers, take your time, look carefully and listen carefully to creation the preacher's voice speaking of God's glory and God's activity.

Poem/Reflection 'Stillness'

reproduced with permission from Canterbury Press. It is from Richard Carter's inspirational book 'The City is my Monastery'. I strongly recommend the book.

We are always moving
So we don't see
Always talking
So we don't hear
Or we hear in snatches, or bites
But we do not listen to the heights or depths.
You actually have to stop to see
To be still to notice
How often we walk through rather than being with
Walk past without offering time or space
Take the photo without realising that the true camera is our inner eye
We think we have to catch up with the world
Actually, we have to be still enough to let the world catch up with us
And meet us in this still place
Our lives can be like fast trains rushing through a station
So fast you cannot read the signs
Only a flash of colour and a blur of people and place
No time to notice
Or see the signs of God

Here and now
Stop
Be in the moment
Lest you miss it and let your mind and body race on
To further racing.

Hymn StF 724 'As if you were not there'

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

<p>1 As if you were not there, the skies ignite and thunder, rivers tear their banks asunder, thieves and nature storm and plunder : all beware as if you were not there.</p> <p>2 As if you were not there, famine and flood together usher death, disease and terror ; stricken mothers wonder whether God heeds prayer, as if you were not there.</p> <p>3 As if you were not there, we televise the dying, watch the helpless victims crying, salve our consciences by sighing, 'Life's unfair !' as if you were not there.</p>	<p>4 As if you were not there, your Son, when faith defied him, faced a crowd which crucified him, leaving friends who had denied him in despair, as if you were not there.</p> <p>5 Because he rose again and showed God's love is vaster than the ultimate disaster, we entreat you now to master strife and pain, because he rose again.</p> <p>John L. Bell (<i>b.</i> 1949) and Graham Maule (<i>b.</i> 1958)</p>
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Prayers – it may be that you prefer to be still with your prayer concerns rather than use the following prayers.

King of Creation, we pray for the people who work tirelessly to protect your beautiful planet. Those on the ground such as rangers protecting endangered species or standing up to illegal loggers. Those politically active as preparations are made for COP 27 in Egypt. Those raising awareness within our communities.

Lord in your mercy Hear our prayer

King of Creation, we pray for the victims of environmental destruction and biodiversity loss. Those islanders at risk from rising sea levels. Those indigenous peoples who are driven from their ancient lands. Farmers whose crops have been decimated by failed rains and raging fires.

Lord in your mercy Hear our prayer

King of Creation, we give you thanks for the late Queen Elizabeth. We pray that her funeral tomorrow (Monday 19th September adapt if necessary) will bring comfort to her family, the nation and the commonwealth and offer you the glory you deserve. Grant to the new King Charles wisdom and grace and buckets loads of strength and patience.

Lord in your mercy Hear our prayer

King of Creation, we pray for our new Prime Minister Liz Truss and her government. Guide her as she leads us. May her government lift us from self-interest and narrow-minded thinking. Enable her to be bold in working for the common good not just for this generation, but for the generations to come.

Lord in your mercy Hear our prayer

In silence let us be still in God's presence with our own petitions for people and places.

Silence

Gracious King, Saviour and Sustainer thank you for this time of prayer. And as we leave pray give back to us those tasks which you have appointed us to carry and grant to us what we need to fulfil them.

In the blessed name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. Amen

Lord's Prayer

Hymn StF 99 All creatures of our God and king (verses 5 – 7)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtT3SRnnG0I>

<p>5 And all who are of tender heart forgiving others, take your part, sing, 'Praise him, alleluia !' All who long pain and sorrow bear, praise God, and on him cast your care : <i>O praise him, O praise him, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia !</i></p> <p>6 And now, most kind and gentle death, waiting to hush our fading breath, O praise him, alleluia ! You homeward lead the child of God, and Christ the Lord the way has trod :</p>	<p>7 Let all things their creator bless, and worship him in humbleness ; O praise him, alleluia ! Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son, and praise the Spirit, Three in One :</p> <p>St Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) <i>translated</i> William Henry Draper (1855–1933) (<i>alt.</i>)</p>	
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Blessing

May the road rise up to meet you.

May the wind be always at your back.

May the sun shine warm upon your face;

the rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again,

may God hold you in the palm of His hand.