

**BASINGSTOKE AND READING METHODIST CIRCUIT
WORSHIP, 7TH MARCH 2021**

Prepared by Peter Frank

Saying Yes to Life – Let the land produce vegetation

Welcome to the third of our Circuit's Lent services in which we are working through Genesis chapter 1. Today we focus on the third day, the day on which God gathers the seas together to create dry land on which plants of every kind could thrive. What have the earth, the grass and the trees to teach us as we journey through Lent to the cross of Jesus and Easter beyond?

Welcome to worship, wherever you are, whoever you're with. Together we enter the presence of God and of each other. We start by giving expression to our delight in creation as we sing of the goodness of the Lord that filled the earth...

Hymn: StF 108: In the beginning God played with the planets

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CbP8vB3FDBQ>

*In the beginning God played with the planets,
set them a-spinning in time and in space,
stars in the night sky, while sun lit the daytime,
blue was the globe that was formed for our race.*

*God saw the seas and the fish that swam in them,
formed the dry land where the trees soon would grow,
animals now could inhabit the countries
warmed by the oceans or covered in snow.*

*After the animals, people were coming,
made in God's likeness to live on the earth;
big the blue planet God gave them to live on,
sharing its riches, its wonder and worth.*

(Alternative from Hymns and Psalms: 334: I sing the almighty power of God) [I Sing the Mighty Power of God - YouTube](#)

Andrew Pratt

Prayer of Adoration

Come, let us sing to our creator God who fills the earth with greenery and goodness and gives life to all things. Let us rejoice together on this day, created and given for our rest and worship. God, you are the beginning and source of all goodness, and know and long for what is good in our lives. You send Jesus to us to reveal the amazing depths of your love, and call us to respond by accepting the life you offer. You come into the centre of everything in your Holy Spirit, binding us together in love although we are apart from each other today. By that Spirit create in us a heart to worship; a heart to lay everything before you, acknowledging our frailty and wrongdoings as we do so...

...and in the stillness we recall your living Word into our lives, "Take heart, your faith has saved you."

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Reading – Psalm 1.1-3

Those whose life is focused on the Word of God are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield good fruit and whose leaves do not wither.

I've lived in Reading for more years than I've lived anywhere else, and I've always associated Reading with trees. My very first experience of the town was walking between

the railway station up to Whiteknights campus as a nervous 18-year old going for my university interview. My route took me along some mature tree-lined residential streets and onto the campus, which itself has a remarkable collection of wonderful trees. The psalmist is also in awe of trees. They appear to stand for stability, reliability, permanence even. The vision here is of trees lining streams of flowing water – it's the picture that Martin reminded us of from Revelation last week. The water is life-giving, flowing from the throne of God, sustaining strength and fruitfulness in our lives. The roots of the trees reach deep into the earth, seeking for the waler of life. Just as we seek for the Lord in scripture, study and life's experiences, reaching out for God's presence and life-affirming Spirit. As water sustains the life of trees, so God's word sustains our lives in all fulness.

Hymn: StF 124: For the fruits of all creation, thanks be to God

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

*For the fruits of his creation,
thanks be to God;
for the gifts to every nation,
thanks be to God;
for the ploughing, sowing, reaping,
silent growth while men are sleeping,
future needs in earth's safe keeping,
thanks be to God!*

*In the just reward of labour,
God's will is done;
in the hope we give our neighbour,
God's will is done;
in our world-wide task of caring
for the hungry and despairing,
in the harvests men are sharing,
God's will is done.*

*For the harvests of the Spirit,
thanks be to God;
for the good we all inherit,
thanks be to God;
for the wonders that astound us,
for the truths that still confound us,
most of all, that love has found us,
thanks be to God!*

Fred Pratt Green

Reading – Genesis 1.9-13

It's not about us

You've heard of the wars of the roses? There was a re-run in our back garden last weekend, and the roses won – I have the scratches to prove it! I'm not much of a gardener, but I like a project. And the current plan is to create a corner in our small, suburban plot where the roses will climb over a metal arch and some trellis and create a delightful habitat, and a place to sit with a cup of tea. This involved transplanting one prickly stalk of a rose from which we've had about 2 blooms in the past 5 years, from its pot on the patio into a newly created bed by the archway. I thought I was doing it a favour, and after battling for some time I succeeded in getting it planted, but not before its revenge was extracted and my blood was shed.

God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation...” and it was so. It all sounds so simple! And God saw that it was good. Time will tell whether my project comes good – it felt like I had to do a little more than speak it into being!

The first thing that strikes me as we study the account of creation in Genesis 1 is that God sees it as good. Repeatedly, God looks at the work of creation and sees that it is good. So let us appreciate this goodness. What does it mean? I’m inclined to paraphrase it as, “It’s not about us”. God looks upon the earth, and its vegetation – plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it, and sees goodness. What God sees gives pleasure. It’s like the artist who looks upon her finished work after struggling for weeks, but sensing when it was just enough – time to put the brush down, to stand back – and being satisfied. It is personal. The new creation is of God. God has given of God, and the divine is revealed in nature. Plant-life is inherently good and has its value before the creation of the animals and birds which would come to feed on it, before the creation of humankind who would come to exploit it. The dry land, the good earth, and its vegetation are of God and are delightful to God. It is a gloriously world-affirming thought, that without us, the world has value in God’s sight. It’s not all about us! God’s work of creation and God’s work of redemption and salvation is not all about humanity. It is true, and we will come to see, that we are created in God’s image and given special honour within the created order of things, but to be reminded that the earth and the plants are good before us is to be reminded that God has given of self into the whole of creation and works in Jesus Christ for the redemption of the whole of creation: “In Christ the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” (Colossians 1.20)

The next point I draw today is the stages of creation of plant-life. “And God said, ‘Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.’ And it was so.” Three stages: vegetation; plants yielding seed; and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed. The first stage is vegetation. The commentators tell us that the original word simply means green. That means a lot! We are so very fortunate in our country to never be far from green. Lawns, fields and leaves are profuse, and if you can’t see the green of vegetation from your living room window you’ll not have far to travel to find it in a garden, park or open countryside. The seeds of the green are hidden – it’s as if the green is the artist’s first wash of colour over the canvas before the detail is superimposed. But then comes the seed-bearing plants – the cereals whose seeds are exposed to view – and the fruit-bearing trees whose seeds are protected by ripening flesh. These stages of plant-life focus on the seed – the fertility that God gives into creation. God delights in the growth, abundance and richness inherent in creation. And in so doing, God provides a banquet of feasting for the animal-life to come.

That abundance, sadly, can no longer be taken for granted. Ruth Valerio tells us of the Quechua farmers of the Peruvian highlands who speak from first-hand experience of climate change. “Before, we knew when the rains were to start and to end during the year. This helped us in our farming. But that’s no longer so. Crops don’t produce well. The climate has changed.” In Cusco, the region of Peru thus affected, trees have been part of the answer. The local church has been at the fore-front of a massive tree-planting initiative to help to stabilize the situation. The trees remove CO₂ from the atmosphere, protect and restore moisture and rich fertility to the soil, act as barriers against frosts, winds and hail, and provide habitats for insects, birds and animals.

As with light and as with water, there is no life without plant-life. The list of the sins of humanity against the dry land and vegetation of God’s creation is long: deforestation;

colonisation and the resettlement of indigenous peoples from their lands; intensive agriculture destroying habitat... this is just the obvious start of the list. For me, one of the most profound Lenten readings comes on Palm Sunday, when we read: "As Jesus came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognised on this day the things that make for peace! But they are hidden from your eyes.'" (Luke 19.42). Jesus approaches Jerusalem to make peace through the blood of his cross, reconciling all things to God. Those divine tears are as surely shed at our destruction of God's good land and green planting as they are over my every other sin. Were someone to slash the artist's good work with a blade as she stands back to admire it, surely she would weep over it. She gave herself into it. She loved it. For me, and for you, and for the whole of creation, Jesus weeps. But more, Jesus weeps, and dies, and then rises to new life, that our hope of reconciliation with God may include the earth and the green, and that that hope may rest in him. May that hope spur us on to care for the earth and the green, which God creates as good. For it is not all about us.

Amen

Hymn: StF 636: O love that wilt not let me go HP 685

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TvA6PYa54sg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nt69WDtYNLo> (alternative traditional video)

*O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee:
I give thee back the life I owe,
that in thine ocean depths its flow
may richer, fuller be.*

*O Light that follows all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee:
my heart restores its borrowed ray,
that in thy sunshine's blaze its day
may brighter, fairer be.*

*O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee:
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
and feel the promise is not vain,
that morn shall tearless be.*

*O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee:
I lay in dust, life's glory dead,
and from the ground there blossoms red
life that shall endless be.*

George Matheson

Prayers of Intercession

(using words by Doreen Newport in Hymns and Psalms no. 572)

In peace, let us pray to God who knows all the world and all peoples and holds them in his hands.

Think of a world without any flowers, think of a world without any trees, think of a sky without any sunshine, think of the air without any breeze. We thank you, Lord, for flowers and trees and sunshine, we thank you, Lord, and praise your holy name.

Creator and reconciling God, we see the devastation of your good earth because of the actions of humanity. We are a part of that action and we lament the loss. We pray for the

work of those who collect and protect seeds, who plant trees, who farm organically to preserve hedgerows and field margins, who clear litter from green spaces and who fight to prevent deforestation.

Think of a world without any people, think of a street with no-one living there, think of a town without any houses, no-one to love and nobody to care. We thank you, Lord, for families and friendships, we thank you, Lord, and praise your holy name.

Creator and reconciling God, we see the lives of those who have no homes to live in, who are refugee because of famine, drought or warfare, who are lonely and feel un-noticed. We are a part of the careless society and lament its inward-looking aspect. We pray for those who bring shelter and food to the poorest amongst us, who phone the lonely and befriend the outcast, who welcome the refugee and who fight to see a more equal sharing of the land and its resources amongst all peoples.

Think of a world without any worship, think of a God without his only Son, think of a cross without a resurrection, only a grave and not a victory won. We thank you, Lord, for showing us our Saviour, we thank you, Lord, and praise your holy name.

In a moment of quietness, shall we pray for our own lives, for those particular burdens on our minds, and offer them to God in service...

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Amen

Hymn: StF 487: You shall go out with joy
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OH0XbpNY2q8>

*You shall go out with joy
And be let forth with peace,
And the mountains and the hills
Will break forth before you.
There'll be shouts of joy
And the trees of the fields
Shall clap, shall clap their hands.*

*And the trees of the fields shall clap their hands,
And the trees of the fields shall clap their hands,
And the trees of the fields shall clap their hands,
And you'll go out with joy.*

**(Alternative from Hymns and
Psalms
699: Lord of creation)**
[Lord of Creation, to You be all praise -
YouTube](#)

Stuart Dauermann and Steffi Geiser Rubin

Blessing

Trusting in what is unseen,
believing the best is to come,
in hope the universe waits:
God's purpose shall be revealed.

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May you know the enduring friendship of the Christ who dies for you, the close companionship of the Spirit who dwells with you, and the eternal love of God who holds you close, today and every day.

Amen.