

Season of Creation study group

September 2022

A Meditation:

Close your eyes and imagine you are holding a ball about half a metre in diameter. Now imagine you are holding the earth in your hands and listen to this meditation called “*Earth Ball*” by Olaf Skarsholt.

If it
were only a few feet
in diameter, floating a few feet
above a field somewhere, people would
come from every where to marvel at it, peo
ple would walk around it marvelling at its big
pools of water, its little pools and the water flow
ing between the pools. People would marvel at the
bumps on it, and the holes in it, and they would marvel
at the very thin layer of gas surrounding it and the water
suspended in the gas. The people would marvel at all the
creatures walking around the surface of the ball , and in
the water. The people would declare it precious because
it was the only one, and they would protect it, so that
it would not be hurt. The ball would be the greatest
wonder known, and people would come to behold it, to
be healed , to gain knowledge, and to know beauty
and to wonder how it could be. People would love
it, and defend it with their lives, because they
would somehow know that their lives. Their
own roundness, could be nothing with
out it. If the earth were only a few
in diameter.

This study group series is based on material produced in South Africa by members of Green Anglicans to whom we are very grateful.

Sessions One – The Earth is the Lord's

Opening Prayer

Eternal God,
We thank you for the glory of your creation
a mystery that surpasses our knowledge and understanding.
Eternal God,
We thank you for the earth and water, sun and wind,
creatures and peoples – cultures – nations:
Guide us as we gather to confess that we have violated the gift of life
given to us.
Strengthen us as we seek to affirm that the earth and all therein is yours.
Enable us as we seek to recall your covenant and make it our own.
Amen.

Land as a divine gift.

Scripture – Deuteronomy 26:1-12.

Questions

- What do you think the people of God gained from their wilderness experience?
- How might we develop relationships that respect land, people and God?

Resting the land

Scripture – Leviticus 25: 1-5 and 8-15.

In these verses from Leviticus, we understand that God ordains that the land is given a time of rest, a '*Sabbath*', a common practice in many traditional societies.

Questions

- What are the advantages of allowing land under production to rest?
- In our growth-orientated world, does the concept of Sabbath, or having limits on production have any thing to contribute to the way in which we view land today?
- What can we learn about our attitude to our work?

Whose land?

Questions

- Leviticus also informs us that land belongs to God, and we as tenants may only lease it.
- If God owns the land, and we are borrowing it from him, what difference should that make to our society and the way we use land?

Closing Prayer

All-powerful God,
you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.
Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one. **Amen**

Session Two – Water: the source of life

Opening prayer:

God our creator,
you have made us one with this earth,
to tend it and to bring forth fruit:
May we so respect and cherish all that has life from you,
that we may share in the labour of all creation
to give birth to your hidden glory,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Water for life

The Bible has many references to water – over 300, not to mention another 80 on rain, but looks at water in many different ways – as a symbol of destruction, of cleansing, of blessing and of spiritual need..

- What’s the first verse that comes to mind when you think about water?

Scripture

“May the Lord open the heavens for you, his rich treasure house, to give rain upon your land at the proper time” (Deuteronomy 28:12)

“to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind” (Ephes 5:26-27).

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you” (Ezekiel 36:25)

Questions

- What is the Bible saying about our need for water?
- What does it say about God’s provision for our spiritual needs?

The Woman at the Well

Scripture – John 4:5-26.

Questions

- What strikes you most about this passage?

- Why do you think it is so significant that Jesus chose to ask a Samaritan woman for water?
- What does this passage say to you about today's water crisis?
- What is the significance of the phrase "living water"?

Reflection

Water: the source of life - of health and refreshment and cleansing and fruitfulness and also of power and beauty, strength and making new.

Water: deep desire and simple necessity. There is no mythology in the world that does not tell stories about water, that does not see water as being at the heart of the divine as well as at the core of human life.

Look at us - we baptise, we wash, we sprinkle, we bless, our preoccupation with our own needs and we even mix a few drops of water in the wine at desires, in the wine at Communion.

Water is a blessing we all need.

Discussion:

- Think about what we could do, as individuals or as a group to save water.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, Living Water
 create in each one of us a pool of peace,
 a deep well of healing that can transform
 bitterness to love
 impatience to patience
 irritation to tolerance
 rejection to acceptance
 and inadequacy to confidence in our own ability.

Holy spirit, powerful wind moving across the waters,
 enable us to recognize in ourselves,
 our preoccupation with our own needs and
 our apathy and ignorance in acknowledging and
 understanding the needs and desires of others.

Empower us to transform this recognition into motivation
 to seek equality, justice and peace
 for all people throughout our world. **Amen.**

Session Three – Climate Change

Opening Prayer

Eternal God, we pray for justice and fairness
for those worst hit by our changing climate.
We know people living in extreme poverty around the world
are worst hit by the climate crisis
but have done the least to contribute to it.
They also have the fewest resources to implement change.
We ask for your mercy O Lord
and repent when our blind consumerism has led
to the destruction of our common home. **Amen.**

Discussion

An Inconvenient Truth is the title of both a documentary film and book by Al Gore highlighting the awkward reality of global warming and climate change. Climate change is awkward and inconvenient because humanity now has to face up to the consequences of its particular concept of progress and attitude to nature. Discovering the life-threatening damage that we have caused to our atmosphere and planet means coming face to face with our own nature and greed and making inconvenient changes to the way we live.

Consider this statement by 19th century Chicago businessman WP Rend:

“Smoke is the incense burning on the altars of industry. It is beautiful to me. It shows that men are changing the forces of nature into articles of comfort for humanity.”

Questions

- What attitude does this statement reveal?
- Do we still hold the same attitude to the use of resources from creation as Rend did?

God and Humanity in Creation

Scripture – Job 38:39-39:8 and Matthew 6:28-30)

Questions

- What do these verses tell us of God's attitude toward creation?

- How does the thought that God cares for creation as much as for human beings strike you? What is its spiritual significance?
- What might it say to our generation in terms of environmental attitude and responsibility?

Salvation and the Work of Christ

Scripture – Romans 8: 18-23

Questions

- What does holiness/salvation look like in this text?
- What significance does salvation have for creation? How would you see this in practical terms?
- Discuss the "*groaning*" of creation. What is the relationship between earth stress and the human condition?
- How is this visible in our communities and environments?
- In the light of this passage how do you see the work of Christ?
- How does an encounter with this story shape who we are and what we might strive to become?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,
 we ask you to stir our hearts into action.
 As global temperatures increase,
 inspire us with ways, we can make a difference
 in our homes, church congregations,
 communities, and the world around us.
 We pray for your prompting
 where we can do more
 to love our neighbour. **Amen.**

Session Four – Need not Greed

Opening Prayer

Lord, open my eyes that I may see the needs of others
Open my ears that I may hear their cries;
Open my heart so that they need not be without succour;
Let me not be afraid to defend the weak
because of the anger of the strong,
Nor afraid to defend the poor because of the anger of the rich.
Show me where love and hope and faith are needed,
And use me to bring them to those places.
And so open my eyes and my ears
That I may each day be able to do some work of peace for thee. **Amen.**

Life-style

Look at some of the adverts from newspapers or magazines.

Questions

- What life-style are these adverts selling?
- What are the differences between the world teenagers are growing up in nowadays and the world you grew up in as a teenager?
- What is the '*modern lifestyle*' that people aspire to?

Scripture – Matthew: 6:19-21, 25-31, 7:7-12, 8:20, 10:29-31

Question

- How would you describe a '*Jesus lifestyle*'?

Simple living

Quotation:

*Our faith calls today for simple living.
'It is obvious that if future generations are to share in a planet as beautiful and fertile as the one this generation shares, we will have to live more simply. All religious traditions have encouraged their followers to live in a simple way and not to become attached to either power or money because these have a way of diverting our hearts from what is most important in life. This call for moderation in our lifestyle is particularly*

significant today It arises from the simple fact that the majority of people will not be able to meet their basic needs for food, clothing and shelter if a small segment of humans sequester the lion's share of the earth's resources. Furthermore, such a way of living is impairing the ability of the planet to sustain future generations at a level that they will need to meet their basic needs. So the Christian challenge to promote moderation today arises from concerns for social justice and the integrity of God's creation.' (Sean McDonagh)

Questions

- How can I as an individual live more simply so that others may simply live?
- How can we as a congregation live more simply?

Money

Quotations:

"The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10)

"You cannot serve both God and money" (Matt 6:24)

Consider also this quote from Resurgence Magazine:

'Money is not wealth. True wealth is good land, healthy animals, flourishing forests, clean water, honest

work, abundant creativity and human imagination. Money was designed to oil the wheels of economic interaction and to ensure that the workings of the market place were smooth and simple.

The purpose of money was and should be to serve the human community as well as the earth community, but now people and planet are put into the service of money. Natural resources are converted into consumables to make money. Whether these consumer goods are necessary or not is irrelevant.

Money favours power and power favours money Modern 'democracy' in most countries, is the government of the rich, for the rich and by the rich. Money is not a God-given fixture: it was designed by us, therefore it can be changed by us. Unless we reform and redesign our money system the idea of sustainability social justice and spiritual renewal will remain a mirage.'

Question

- What challenges do these bible verses and this quote leave us with?

Causes of poverty



Question

- Consider this drawing. Which has the greatest impact on the natural environment - population growth or over-consumption, given that a child in the "developed west" will use 50 times more energy than a person in a developing country, but at the same time the world is running out of food, with the world's population increasing by one billion people in 15 years?

Closing Prayer

Grant us, Lord God,
a vision of your world as your love would have it:
a world where the weak are protected, and none go hungry or poor;
a world where the riches of creation are shared,
and everyone can enjoy them;
a world where different races and cultures
live in harmony and mutual respect;
a world where peace is built with justice, and justice is guided by love.
Give us the inspiration and courage to build it,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Session Five – Stewardship: caring for God’s creation

Opening prayer

Ever living God,
you created the Earth and all that is in it and found it very good
Forgive us all that we have done to harm the Earth and one another
God of life and love you created all that exists to sustain life here on Earth, human life and all forms of life
Forgive us all that we have done to harm the Earth and one another
God of mercy and hope forgive us our apathy and arrogance,
short sightedness and greed.
Guide us now in the study of your Holy word. **Amen.**

Quotations:

And Jesus said to them "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation." (Mark 16:15)

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the lamb through the middle of the street of the city On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month: and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.' (Revelation 22:1-2)

Questions

- What is the good news that we are called to bring to the whole creation?
- What do you understand by "the healing of the nations"?
- How can we celebrate creation in new, more meaningful and imaginative ways in our congregation?
- Where can we make space for new ideas in order to infuse the ideas of creation care into the thinking, teachings and learning of our faith?

Quotation:

is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture but you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture? When you drink of clear water must you foul the rest with your feet? (Ezekiel 34:18)

Questions:

- 'Stewardship' can be applied to the wise management of money, material and human resources. As members of our church, how do we respond to the urgent call to live more sustainably, more lightly on the earth?

- What kind of stewards have we been? How wisely have we 'managed' the earth's fruitfulness?

Quotation:

Wherever the river goes every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish, once these waters reach there. It will become fresh and everything will live where the river goes. (Ezekiel 47:9)

Questions:

- What can we change or improve so that we are less wasteful and more careful to sustain the fruits of the earth?
- What can we change or improve to make our office more eco-friendly?
- What can we do to manage and conserve water more effectively?
- How can we raise awareness about the problems of energy use and climate change?
- What ideas can we implement to manage our energy use more efficiently and effectively?
- What can we do to reduce and manage our waste in our faith community, our homes and our community more effectively?
- How can we become better 'earth keepers' with our land?

Closing Prayer

May you be blessed with discomfort
at easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships
so that you may live deep within your heart.

May you be blessed with anger
at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people
so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May you be blessed with tears
to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger and war
so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them
and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness
to believe that you can make a difference in the world
so that you can do what others claim cannot be done
to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor. **Amen.**