

CHRISTCHURCH

EAST GREENWICH



Lent Course 2020

Care for God's Creation

Saying Yes to Life

#LiveLent - A Study of Genesis 1

Based on the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book 2020:

SAYING YES TO LIFE

BY RUTH VALERIO

“As part of the global church we are called to care not just for God’s creation, but for our brothers and sisters all over the world who face having their families uprooted and their livelihoods destroyed by the effects of climate change. Every single one of us has a responsibility as part of our discipleship to Jesus Christ to live a life that cares for God’s world and its creatures.”

The above is Justin Welby’s comment on the following delegate’s statement at the Anglican communion in Fiji:

“For you Europeans, climate change is a problem for the future. For us it is a problem of everyday survival. Water levels have been rising, forcing populations to relocate, and cyclones have devastated communities.”

The Genesis 1 Order of Creation is as follows:

Day 1 – light: day and night

Day 2 – waters above (sky); waters below (sea)

Day 3 – land separated from sea

Day 4 – sun, moon and stars

Day 5 – birds and sea creatures

Day 6 – land animals

Day 7 – God’s rest

Please note:

The Leader's words are in regular text and the Group's response is in bolded text.

OPENING PRAYERS EACH WEEK

(Light a candle.)

O God, make speed to save us.

O Lord, make haste to help us.

Hear our voice, O Lord, according to your faithful love,
according to your judgement give us life.

Blessed are you, Lord God of our salvation,
to you be glory and praise for ever.

In the darkness of our sin you have shone in our hearts
to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God
in the face of Jesus Christ.

Open our eyes to acknowledge your presence,
that freed from the misery of sin and shame
we may grow into your likeness from glory to glory.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Blessed be God for ever.

That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful,
let us pray with one heart and mind.

Silence is kept.

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,
so may your mercy come down upon us to cleanse our hearts
and set us free to sing your praise now and for ever.

Amen.

Psalm for the evening.

Ending:

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Genesis Reading for the evening.

Ending:

This is the word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Gospel Reading for the evening.

Ending:

This is the word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

The Magnificat (The Song of Mary) – Luke 1: 46-55

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour;
he has looked with favour on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed;
the Almighty has done great things for me
and holy is his name.
**He has mercy on those who fear him,
from generation to generation.**
He has shown strength with his arm
and has scattered the proud in their conceit,
**Casting down the mighty from their thrones
and lifting up the lowly.**

He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.

**He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,
to remember his promise of mercy,**

The promise made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his children for ever.

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;**

**as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

(Extinguish candle.)

CLOSING PRAYERS EACH WEEK

(Light a candle.)

Pray for anyone known to us who is in particular need.

Ending:

Lord, in your mercy.
hear our prayer.

The Collect

Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness, and was tempted as we are, yet without sin: give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your Spirit; and, as you know our weakness, so may we know your power to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Trusting in the compassion of God,
as our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

The Conclusion

May God our redeemer show us compassion and love.
Amen.

Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

(Extinguish candle.)

Week 1:

LET THERE BE LIGHT



- **Opening Prayers** (*see the beginning of this booklet*)
- **Readings:** **Genesis 1: 1-5; Psalm 33: 6-9; John 3: 16-21**
- **The Nature of the Course:**
 - (a) Connect Groups study '*Saying Yes to Life*' using this booklet, which is based on the book.
 - (b) During Lent we undertake personal daily reflection on care for the environment, using the small booklet, *Care For God's Creation*: a 40-day challenge from Ash Wednesday to Easter Day, OR using the app #LiveLent, OR signing up for the daily #LiveLent emails on the Church of England website.
- **Leader hands out copies of the booklet *Care For God's Creation*. Ask someone to read from the booklet the **opening Introduction** to the Course, written by the Archbishops of York & Canterbury.**

(1) Readings: Read the Genesis passage again.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.³ Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light.⁴ And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

(2) Reactions to the Genesis passage.

- What stands out for you?
- What is your understanding of the first biblical account of creation?

(3) Commentary

- Ancient cultures such as the Mesopotamians and Babylonians all have creation stories, often featuring tribal war-like beings fighting and sometimes accidentally producing the created order. The Hebrew Scriptures commence with the Genesis account which differs: there is one true God who commands, and Creation is brought into being. (See also Job 38: 1, 4-7 where we get a sense of God's delight and interest in his creation.)
- The Genesis account was written down from previous documents and the oral tradition, probably in phases between 900 to 500 BC. Genesis 2 is a different creation account.
- The Hebrew word 'to create' (*bara*) is only used for God's activity in the Old Testament. We worship God because he is the Creator and he has entrusted his Creation to us. As Christians we tend to focus on Salvation, but Creation and Salvation are intimately connected and held together: 'there can be no redemption without creation' (see Colossians 1: 20).

- The opening verses of Genesis 1 speak of a dark empty nothingness. It's not exactly clear what the writer is describing, but whatever it is, into this condition God speaks: *Let there be light*. God's voice in nature is ceaseless and enduring. In other words, it is not God *said* but God *says*.
- Jesus declares that he is the light of the world (see John 8: 12).

(4) Discussion

- Do we feel we are custodians of God's creation, with responsibility for our own survival?
- What place does God as Creator have in your faith and in that of your church? How might it make a difference if that understanding was more strongly emphasised?
- Where does light feature in your own life? Can you share any particular experiences that have given you a new appreciation of light?
- All of us need to make changes if the climate crisis is to be averted. Access to light is essential for any community to thrive. But it takes energy. Electricity is one of the largest sources of CO₂ emissions. If we are to provide light (and heat etc) in the world we will have to do that in ways that use renewable resources. What actions will we take?

If there is time and you have the facilities, watch an interview with Christiana Figueres, who was executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change:

<https://spckpublishing.co.uk/saying-yes-resources>

(5) Closing Prayers *(see the beginning of this booklet)*

Week 1:

LET THERE BE LIGHT – PERSONAL REFLECTION

- In the sun, due to gravity, fusion of hydrogen atoms into helium leads to release of enormous amounts of heat and light.
- Light first formed more or less suddenly, 300,000 years after the 'Big Bang'.
- Light travels at 186,000 miles a second (671 million miles per hour) – so light takes eight minutes to reach Earth from the sun.
- Light from our nearest star takes four years to reach us. Light from the furthest galaxies takes billions of years to reach us.
- White light is made up of many colours, as in the rainbow.
- If the sun was extinguished today, global temperatures would quickly reach minus 70°C, and almost all life on earth would end after a few weeks.

*As we start our Lenten journey with the theme of light,
and as we respond to what we've looked at here,
let us begin by stepping into God's light
and asking him to open our eyes to the many dark places
both in our own lives and in the world.*

Week 2:

LET THE WATERS BE SEPARATED



- **Opening Prayers** (see the beginning of this booklet)
- **Readings:** **Genesis 1: 6-8; Psalm 65: 9-13; John 4: 1-14**
- How are people are **getting on** with the booklet *Care For God's Creation* – a 40-day challenge from Ash Wednesday to Easter Day?

(1) Readings: Read the Genesis passage again.

⁶And God said, 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.'⁷ So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. ⁸God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

(2) Reactions to the Genesis passage.

- What stands out for you?

(3) Commentary

- God speaks and calls into being a 'vault' between the waters to separate the water from the water. The word 'vault' is also translated *firmament* or *dome* or *expanse*. It is the creation of the sky and sees God bring control and order to the swirling chaotic mass of deep waters mentioned in Genesis 1: 2.
- Alongside light, water is an essential element for life. Water is a powerful symbol throughout the Bible. This reflects the fact that the Bible was written by people who were intensely aware of how precious water was, and the ever-present threat of it running out.
- Water has a shadow side to it. It can bring life but it can also bring death and suffering, whether through engulfing people or through being unclean and undrinkable, transmitting diseases.
- In the gospels, we see that Jesus is Lord over the wind and the waves. He is the living water that satisfies our needs. Water is also a symbol of our baptism: our old self is made dead, so that our new self might be made alive, resurrected with Christ.
- Just as all life is intimately associated with water, so every part of our being is part of the Godhead because of his infinite presence.

(4) Discussion

- Think about a favourite stretch of water and consider what might help you to acknowledge and pay attention to it.
- What personal action will you take to look after the world's precious resource of water, and those who depend on it?
- What can we do as a church to promote the sacred nature of water both as a physical substance and also for its spiritual meaning (e.g. to satisfy people's thirst for God)?
- Could we support a charity like Water Aid?
- All creation exists in God: How does this expand your understanding of the world and its relationship to God?

If there is time and you have the facilities, watch the interview with Archbishop of Cape Town Thabo Makgoba about the water crisis in South Africa:

<https://spckpublishing.co.uk/saying-yes-resources>

You could also watch an extract of Blue Planet II with David Attenborough on sea pollution:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLx4fVsYdTI>

(5) Closing Prayers *(see the beginning of this booklet)*

Week 2:

LET THE WATERS BE SEPARATED – PERSONAL REFLECTION

- Two atoms of hydrogen – the commonest element in the universe - combine with one of oxygen to make water (H₂O).
- Humans can't live without drinking water for more than four or five days. Humans are 70% water, hence the brain's desperation to get more of it, manifested as thirst.
- Water is slightly sticky and viscous, so the molecules get together and drops form. Water expands as it freezes so ice is lighter than liquid water. This is important because it means that all aquatic life can survive the winter.
- Estimates vary, but, on average, each person uses about 80-100 gallons of water per day, for indoor home uses - as well as drinking it and cooking, we must have running water to keep clean, do the washing, and flush away unpleasant substances.
- As virtually all water is recycled, we are still drinking the same water that was present on the earth billions of years ago.

Week 3:

LET THE LAND PRODUCE VEGETATION



- **Opening Prayers** (see the beginning of this booklet)
- **Readings:** [Genesis 1: 9-13](#); [Psalm 104: 14-17](#); [John 15: 1-11](#)
- How are people are **getting on** with the booklet *Care For God's Creation* – a 40-day challenge from Ash Wednesday to Easter Day?

(1) Readings: Read the Genesis passage again.

⁹ And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹ Then God said, 'Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.' And it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

(2) Reactions to the Genesis passage.

- What stands out for you?

(3) Commentary

- We see a beautiful movement taking place: the emptiness and formlessness of watery chaos are transformed as we see the waters of the Earth being gathered together and drawn back like a curtain so that dry ground might appear. As that happens, so the land and seas are brought into being, followed by land vegetation.
- We have the repeated phrase *God saw that it was good*. This phrase is used seven times in Genesis 1 including verse 31 where God declares that *all he has made is very good*. This reflects the understanding of completeness that the number seven holds within Judaism. God's creation is abundant. This is a God who loves to bless, a God who delights in growth and richness.
- The importance of this pronouncement of the individual aspects of creation as being good should not be underestimated. A lot of Christians think that the world is a lost place and see it in a negative light. 'Only heaven matters.' However, Genesis tells us this is not the case. God is creator and the act of creation is in his very nature. Each part of creation has its own value that does not depend on its value for other parts.
- We have to beware of thinking in a dualistic way - in other words separating *body* and *spirit*, *Earth* and *heaven*, *natural* and *spiritual* - because this exalts the latter and denigrates the former.
- This passage with its emphasis on seed-bearing plants and trees reminds us that the people of God in the Scriptures lived their lives deeply dependent on agriculture. We all depend on agriculture for our existence.
- We must recognise that *the land* plays a role in creating an identity. When people are robbed of their land (e.g. through colonisation, colonialism and other forces), there may be a deep grief associated with its loss.

(4) Discussion

- We talked about a false dualism that separates our body and spirit, Earth and heaven, natural and spiritual things; and that some view body, earth and nature as inferior. Does this reflect the Christian tradition within which you stand? Where have you seen this attitude played out?
- How does the fresh realisation of the place of land and trees in the Bible affect your thinking?
- In what ways do you feel connectedness to the land, if at all? What helps you to appreciate that more deeply? In what ways has colonisation, colonialism or other forces impacted any region or country in which you have lived?
- Consider how your actions have an impact on forests and vegetation, whether through meat that comes from deforested land, or wood or paper products you may buy. What steps could you and your church take in response?

If there is time and you have the facilities, watch 'The Importance of Trees' (it is a kind of slide show):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-OoHjjh5fM>

(5) Closing Prayers *(see the beginning of this booklet)*

Week 3:

LET THE LAND PRODUCE VEGETATION – PERSONAL REFLECTION

- Trees and other vegetation have many functions: they absorb carbon dioxide, produce oxygen through photosynthesis (see below), transport water (through transpiration) from deep underground into the air which then brings rain to other parts of the forest; they stabilise soils to prevent erosion, and provide a habitat for millions of species of animals. We are also aware of the aesthetic effect of a green environment on human well-being. However, as we know, vast areas of forest and jungle are being removed or cleared for logging and food production.
- Photosynthesis is a process used by plants, algae and certain bacteria to combine CO₂ and water in the presence of light. This makes chemical energy for the plant. In most cases, oxygen is also released as a waste product. Photosynthesis is largely responsible for producing and maintaining the oxygen content of the Earth's atmosphere, and it supplies all of the organic (carbon-based) compounds and most of the energy necessary for life on Earth.
- It has been suggested that we need to plant a trillion (thousand billion) trees to reduce CO₂: <https://www.trilliontrees.org>
- Just like fertilised animal ova (eggs), seeds are remarkable structures that contain all that is necessary to produce anything from a tiny plant to a giant tree. Seed banks have been set up around the world to ensure the survival of many plants should a global crisis occur. An example is the *Svalbard Global Seed Vault* on the Norwegian island of Spitsbergen, in the remote Arctic Svalbard archipelago: <http://www.seedvault.no>

Week 4:

LET THERE BE LIGHTS IN THE SKY



- **Opening Prayers** (see the beginning of this booklet)
- **Readings:** [Genesis 1: 14-19](#); [Psalm 19: 1-6](#); [John 1: 1-9](#)
- How are people are **getting on** with the booklet *Care For God's Creation* – a 40-day challenge from Ash Wednesday to Easter Day?

(1) Readings: Read the Genesis passage again.

¹⁴ And God said, 'Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.' And it was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

(2) Reactions to the Genesis passage.

- What stands out for you?

(3) Commentary

- Light is good. Darkness is good. God declares both the night and the day to be good. Darkness is important: it is a time for rest, for cooling in a hot climate, for sleep. Psalm 104: 20: *You make darkness, and it is night, when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.*
- The wording makes it clear that the stars and planets do not have power in themselves, as astrology would have us believe: they are not to be worshipped (some tribes adjacent to Israel would have worshipped sun, moon and stars).
- The Psalms in particular are overwhelming in the beautiful language of God's creation of the heavenly bodies, for example Psalms 19, 33, 147 (*'he determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name'*). See also Job 38: 31-33.
- The sun, moon and stars are also intimately involved with the rhythm of the solar system and the universe. In Genesis 8, God promises that as long as the Earth endures, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.
- The words of the teacher in the book of Ecclesiastes: *There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the heavens.* The Celtic Christians are well known for being a people strongly rooted in natural seasons: Celtic prayers and blessings include different elements of the natural world and its rhythms. The Celtic cross has the round circle of the Sun in the middle. This is not nature worship, but Christ-mysticism that references nature.
- The sun moon and stars are also often referenced in the Bible with regard to the future and end-times: for example, Matthew 24:29-31 and most of Revelation. These provide a picture language of the end of all things.

(4) Discussion

- How much is the wider creation brought into your church worship gatherings? Is it naturally incorporated into your prayers, songs, liturgies and sermons? How could you help that happen more?
- Are you moved to praise God in what you see in nature or films or images?
- Do you feel that we are living at the end of times? In what ways does this motivate you how to live now?
- In this series, what things have you committed to do and have you done them?

If there is time and you have the facilities, watch the interview with Professor Martin Rees, Cosmologist (starting at 4.40 minutes):

<https://spckpublishing.co.uk/saying-yes-resources>

(5) Closing Prayers *(see the beginning of this booklet)*

Week 4:

LET THERE BE LIGHTS IN THE SKY – PERSONAL REFLECTION

- 'He also made the stars' (Genesis 1: 16 – NIV Bible) is such a throwaway line. There are at least 250 billion stars in the Milky Way, and a billion trillion stars in the observable universe distributed among two trillion galaxies.
- In the Solar System alone, it would take us 5000 years to reach Neptune travelling in a car at 70mph.
- The moon not only gives us reflected sunlight, but it makes Earth a more liveable planet by moderating earth's wobble on its axis, leading to a relatively stable climate. It also causes the tides of the sea, creating a rhythm that has guided humans for thousands of years.
- Jupiter is more than twice as massive as all the other planets *combined*. It seems to protect earth from comets and asteroids because its huge gravity deflects these objects.
- Beyond our own solar system, we have discovered thousands of planetary systems orbiting other stars in the Milky Way.

Week 5:

LET THE WATERS AND AIR TEEM WITH LIVING CREATURES



- **Opening Prayers** (see the beginning of this booklet)
- **Readings:** Genesis 1: 20-23; Psalm 104: 1, 4-17; Luke 2: 25-35 (this is the Gospel reading for Mothering Sunday)
- How are people are **getting on** with the booklet *Care For God's Creation* – a 40-day challenge from Ash Wednesday to Easter Day?

(1) Readings: Read the Genesis passage again.

²⁰ And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.' ²¹ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.' ²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

(2) Reactions to the Genesis passage.

- What stands out for you?

(3) Commentary

- We get a picture of a teeming abundance of life in the sea and skies. God looks and sees again that it is good. One gets a sense that the creation, with its colour and vibrancy and diversity, brings incredible pleasure to God.
- For the first time God pronounces a blessing on his creatures, telling them to be fruitful and multiply. We sometimes miss the fact that God blesses all his creatures with that command, not just Adam and Eve.
- The word for 'creatures' and 'being' is the same Hebrew word – *nepeš*, pronounced 'nephesh' – which elsewhere is literally translated 'soul', but commonly means *life* or *being*. It is used for humans *and* animals, but not plants. For example, Deuteronomy 6: 5: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your nepeš and with all your strength*. People sometimes ask if creatures have souls. Perhaps the most we can say is that they have life and being in the same way that we do.
- We usually think about the people in the Bible, but also mentioned are at least 30 different types of bird. Common birds are dove, raven, eagle and sparrow.
- Jesus talks about how no sparrow will fall to the ground without the Father's care – making us think of how much our heavenly Father loves and cares for us.
- Apart from Jonah and one or two others, there are fewer mentions of the sea, possibly because an Israelite's nature was to stay on the land. However, much of Jesus's ministry takes place of course around Lake Galilee, where there is a fishing tradition.

(4) Discussion

- In the light of Mothering Sunday, what do you feel of the concepts 'Mother Earth' and 'Mother Church' – especially in terms of concern for the welfare of the planet?
- What experiences have you heard of seeing life 'teeming' in the natural world? Take time to appreciate those experiences and thank God for them.
- Around the world, many chickens have been reared in cramped and intensive conditions. It has been said that it is 'unchristian' to eat such farmed food. How do you feel about that? Do you agree, or not, and why?
- Make a mental note of the different ways you use plastics, which can end up in the oceans as large objects or micro-plastics. What plastic things will you decide now to abandon or find an alternative for? How could your church get involved with these topics we have discussed?
- Studies have shown that plant, animal and insect species are 30% more abundant on organic than non-organic farms. So should we be 'going organic'?

If there is time and you have the facilities, watch the interview with Professor Meric Srokosz, Oceanographer:

<https://spckpublishing.co.uk/saying-yes-resources>

(5) Closing Prayers *(see the beginning of this booklet)*

Week 5:

LET THE WATERS AND AIR TEEM WITH LIVING CREATURES – PERSONAL REFLECTION

- There are at least 11,000 bird species, 30,000 fish species and probably 6 to 10 million species of insects. Birds are facing a crisis with 14% at risk of extinction, with overall numbers plummeting worldwide. In the UK there are now half as many birds in the countryside as there were 40 years ago. The majority of birds in the world are factory chickens.
- Humans are overfishing the sea, with trawler-nets scooping up many creatures, as well as fish, out of the sea. Local fisherman may use nets with small holes that catch young fish that have not yet grown to maturity and reproduce.
- Migration is remarkable: e.g. the Arctic Tern can do a round trip of 25,000 miles. But in some countries horrendous slaughter takes place as people come out to trap and shoot down the birds.
- The water cycle of oceans sustains life on the land by distributing warmth around the world, and absorbs CO₂ through the plankton that live in the ocean.
- Every year there are more than 3.4 million deaths from waterborne diseases, making it the leading cause of disease and death around the world. Most of those deaths are among young children, about 4,000 a day.

Week 6:

LET THE LAND PRODUCE LIVING CREATURES AND LET US MAKE HUMANKIND



- **Opening Prayers** (*see the beginning of this booklet*)
- **Readings:** **Genesis 1: 24-31; Psalm 8; Mark 1: 9-13**
- How are people are **getting on** with the booklet *Care For God's Creation* – a 40-day challenge from Ash Wednesday to Easter Day?

(1) Readings: Read the Genesis passage again.

²⁴ And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.' And it was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'

²⁷ So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' ²⁹ God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. ³¹ God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

(2) Reactions to the Genesis passage.

- What stands out for you?

(3) Commentary

- As with the creatures of the air and sea, discussed last week, the land is also destined to produce living *nepeš* – life, beings or souls. We all have God's breath within us.
- We are told that animals are made '*according to their kind*' - an important phrase that reflects biodiversity and the preservation of each separate and distinct species.
- There is an important verse at the start of Jesus's ministry when he was tempted in the wilderness: Mark 1: 13: *He was with the wild beasts*. This not only confirms the independent value of the animals (he does not try to control or dominate them), but also affirms that the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus includes the wider animal kingdom. Animals were naturally part of Jesus's world. He talks about sheep, wolves, snakes, dogs and so on, and it is a donkey that takes him to Jerusalem.

- In his teaching, he indicates that animals have value, but humans have more value. In the difficult passage about the Gerasene swine, Matthew 8, Jesus casts the demons into pigs because that was the lesser of two evils.
- In the creation of human beings, it says 'Let us make...' which may refer to the concept of the 'celestial court' that we see elsewhere in the Old Testament.
- *We are made in the image of God.* But we cannot jump from this to say that other creatures therefore have no relationship with God. Being made in God's image gives us a job to do, with which no other part of the created order is tasked. This also carries significance: how we view our relationships with one another, as well as with the wider creation.

(4) Discussion

- Reflect on this phrase from Pope Francis: *Earth is our common home.*
- What does it mean to you that *all people* have been made in God's image? In what ways can you reflect God's image in your own life in relation to other people?
- How do we adjust our eating habits to improve the planet? How willing are you to change the way you eat?
- Should we as Christians join Extinction Rebellion rallies?
- Our current levels of creature extinction and loss of biodiversity are underpinned by consumerism. It is causing immense damage. We need to buy and use less in order to take better care of the natural world. What better time to do this than Lent? Should we all become vegetarians or vegans?
- We often read about certain species being threatened because parts of them are used in 'traditional' medicines. What can we do about this, seeing as these issues take place in other parts of the world?

If there is time and you have the facilities, watch a January 2020 speech at Davos by Greta Thunberg:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iae6cNoBWRo>

(5) Feedback on the Course:

- Briefly discuss whether it has been enjoyable and meaningful?
- What could be improved?
- Has it changed your attitudes and approach to **caring for creation**?

(6) Closing Prayers (*see the beginning of this booklet*)

Week 6:

LET THE LAND PRODUCE LIVING CREATURES AND LET US MAKE HUMANKIND – PERSONAL REFLECTION

- Currently, around one in four mammals is at risk of extinction.
- For true human flourishing to occur, both women and men need to be able to live their lives to the full. Gender equality is also the best way to tackle over-population. 70% of food globally is produced by smallholder farmers, the majority of whom are women.
- As Christians we need to challenge ourselves on the extent of our meat-eating to ensure it only comes from animals we know have lived and died well. We need to move towards a more plant-based diet for the sake of the planet.

*In the Thanksgiving address said by some Native Americans,
they address each part of creation, for example:*

*'We gather our minds together to send greetings and thanks
to all the animal life in the world.*

They have many things to teach us as people.

We see them near our homes and in the deep forests.

We are glad they are still here and we hope it will always be so.'

Week 7:

GOD'S REST

- **Reading:** *Genesis 2: 1-3*

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. ²And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. ³So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

To contemplate in your own time:

- Why would God have to 'rest'?
- Think about how we rest and enjoy (in a godly way) a day off a week.
- Am I challenged to observe a day of rest more than I do?
- How can I help others rest?
- What about people who have to work many Sundays, or have caring and other commitments?

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